PATTERNS ON THE LANDSCAPE:
Heritage Conservation in North Omaha

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Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission

Acknowledgements

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1. Zion Baptist Church, 2215 Grant Street, 1984
(Omaha City Planning Department)
2. 24th and Lake Streets, 1944
24th and Lake first achieved importance as a commercial intersection in the 1890's and became the heart of the black business district after 1920.
(Omaha World-Herald)

I. Introduction



North Omaha is a witness to change. It has seen prosperity, depression, decline and the beginning of rebirth in the past century. The people of North Omaha helped build and maintain the area, and gave it the life that made the neighborhood distinctive. The area has always been a home for new immigrants in the city, from Irish, Scandinavians and Germans in the late nineteenth century, mainland Italians and Eastern European Jews by the 1900's, to blacks from the South by World War I. For the first 50 years it was a place where people got started, and then moved farther north or west as their fortunes increased. Beginning in the Teens, North Omaha flourished as the black community developed a culture and social life that persisted for several decades.

North 24th Street reached its height in the 1920's when it was the heart of the black community. Black-owned grocery stores and drugstores thrived as the growing community provided plenty of business. Black professionals, physicians, attorneys and dentists all had offices on North 24th. But the street was probably best known as an entertainment center. Dreamland Hall and other clubs hosted the big bands and attracted Omahans from all over the city to hear jazz — the music that was getting its start in the black centers of U.S. cities. The Franklin, Alhambra, and Ritz Theaters showed the latest black movies, including some created by Omahan George Johnson and his Lincoln Film Company.

Unlike the previous residents of North Omaha, blacks who settled there were unable to move out. Just as the 1920's brought the flourishing of the community, it also brought the rigid boundaries of segregation which forced blacks to live in a constricted area. This community weathered the depression and the decline of the area after World War II, as plans and promises for revitalization through urban renewal failed to materialize. By the 1960's, North Omaha's buildings were suffering from age and intensive use. As the physical and economic environment of the area deteriorated, North Omaha witnessed riots that destroyed buildings along 24th Street and ended its commercial viability for a decade.

While open housing laws facilitated some movement out of North Omaha, many residents chose to stay in the neighborhood. It remained the heart of the community and black citizens worked tirelessly to rebuild the area socially while searching for the financial support to rebuild it physically. Not all residential neighborhoods had decayed, and homeowners labored to maintain the fine old districts with their wide, tree-shaded streets and unique architectural treasures.



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It is to these North Omahans that this document is dedicated. Their persistence and efforts to save their neighborhood have been significant forces in checking the decay that threatened to ruin the area twenty years ago. The aim of this plan is to conserve the resources of North Omaha: its people, its buildings, and its whole environment. Revitalization must benefit the residents who fought to maintain the neighborhood through the lean years. At the same time, buildings and neighborhoods that are important for historic, architectural or cultural reasons must be identified and included in future redevelopment activities.

This process of identifying important buildings and neighborhoods is one step in conserving neighborhoods and a primary goal of this plan. Some of these structures or areas may also be designated as landmark heritage preservation sites or landmark heritage preservation districts in recognition of their special unique qualities. Designation of historic, architectural and culturally significant structures and neighborhoods is relatively new to Omaha. In 1977, Title 4 of the Omaha Municipal Code was amended to include the Landmark Heritage Preservation Ordinance. Its stated purpose was to:

1. Designate, preserve, protect, enhance and perpetuate those structures and districts which reflect significant elements of the city's heritage;
2. Foster civic pride in the beauty and accomplishments of the past;
3. Stabilize and improve the aesthetic and economic vitality and values of such structures and districts;
4. Protect and enhance the city's attraction to visitors;
5. Promote the use of outstanding structures or districts for the education, stimulation and welfare of city residents;
6. Promote and encourage continued private ownership and utilization of such buildings and other structures so owned and used.

The Ordinance established the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission, composed of seven members appointed by the Mayor, with the approval of the City Council. The City Planning Director serves as Executive Director of the Commission, and the Planning Department staff pro-

1. George A. Shepard House, 1802 Wirt Street, ca. 1903

Stone mason and artist George Shepard built his grand residence in the Kountze Place neighborhood in 1903. Its style reflected the more restrained classical detailing popularized by the Trans-Mississippi Exposition held on the northern edge of Kountze Place in 1898.
(Collection of Lenora Shepard Mattox)



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vides required technical assistance. The Commission hears requests for landmark heritage preservation sites or landmark heritage preservation district designation, and forwards its recommendations to the City Planning Board and City Council. Properties are evaluated for their historical, cultural, architectural, engineering, geographic or archaeological importance. If the City Council agrees that a structure or district is worthy, they designate it as a landmark heritage preservation site or a landmark heritage preservation district. After designation by the City Council, a building's exterior must not be modified or altered without the approval of the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission. This review by the Commission insures that no alterations occur which could harm the character of the building.

Designation of a building through Omaha's Landmark Heritage Preservation Ordinance also increases the chances that the structure will be nominated for the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is an official listing of important buildings and neighborhood districts throughout the United States. The Nebraska State Historical Society makes these nominations to the Department of the Interior. If a structure is accepted for the National Register, its owners may qualify for federal tax benefits. However, these are available only if the building is income producing, such as an apartment or commercial building, and if the structure is substantially rehabilitated.

The Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission has published *A Comprehensive Program for Historic Preservation in Omaha* which discusses the designation of buildings under the Landmark Heritage Preservation Ordinance and the National Register in more detail. The *Comprehensive Program* also provides more specific information about criteria for designation, identification of historic districts, and methods for carrying out preservation projects in Omaha. This document should be consulted when seeking detailed information on recognition of important structures.

Buildings and neighborhoods recommended for designation by the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission have reflected a wide range of categories in achieving significance. The past record of designations in North Omaha has reflected this concept. Among the landmarks are several recognized primarily for architectural significance such as St. John A.M.E. Church at 2402 North 22nd, the Bay-Fry residence (now Queen Anne Manor) at 2024 Binney Street, and the George F. Shepard residence at 1802 Wirt Street. Others were designated on the basis of historic and cultural significance, such as the Jewell Building (Dreamland Hall) at 2221-2225 North 24th Street, the Great Plains Black Museum (former Webster Telephone Exchange) at 2213 Lake, the birthsite of Malcolm X at 3448 Pinkney, and the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition site from 16th to 24th, Pinkney to Pratt.

In order to identify important buildings and neighborhoods, it is necessary to know and understand the history of North Omaha. This plan begins with a discussion of the physical, social and cultural development of the area. Most of North Omaha was built in two main construction periods: the boom era of the 1880's, which saw Omaha's rise into a metropolitan center, and the golden era of growth ushered in by the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898 and ending with World War I. The construction periods were also characterized by waves of European immigrant groups moving in and out of North Omaha. The history continues with the growth of Omaha's black population and its movement to the Near North Side by the 1920's. The analysis examines the decline of the area after World War II as well as its rebirth in recent years. The history establishes the significance of structures and neighborhoods by analyzing their role in the development and change of North Omaha.

The next section of the plan focuses on the built environment: the existing buildings, an analysis of architectural styles and types, and suggestions for repairs as well as for new construction that will contribute to the character of North Omaha. It is also important to discuss issues such as the age and condition of housing, demographic characteristics, land use conflicts, and displacement of residents, all of which can have an effect on conservation in North Omaha. Section IV establishes goals and

2. George A. Shepard House, 1802 Wirt Street, 1984

The current owners purchased the house from the Shepard family in the 1950's and have carefully maintained its elegant character and architectural features. The house received additional restoration work in recent years as part of a neighborhood target area and was named a City Landmark in 1981.

(Omaha City Planning Department)

3. Blue Lion Center, 24th and Lake Streets, 1984

The rehabilitation of two business buildings into the Blue Lion Center has provided new firms with a convenient location and signalled the first new commercial ventures on North 24th Street in recent years.

(Omaha City Planning Department)



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strategies designed to address these concerns.

North Omaha is a variety of neighborhoods, each with different elements which require particular attention. It contains commercial districts, most notably North 24th Street, and industrial sections in the southeast corner and along the Belt Line Railroad on the northern edge. The residential districts consist of neighborhoods as varied as the apartment buildings that line 16th Street to the small houses of the Long School area where many early black residents lived, and the Binney-Wirt-Spencer neighborhood with its fine old homes which form a potential historic district. A final section of this plan, devoted to recommendations, offers suggestions for conservation tailored to meet the needs of each area.

The physical and cultural heritage of North Omaha is among the most unique and significant the city has to offer. The neighborhood possesses a special environment that has often been overlooked in the past by local government officials, developers from the city and elsewhere and Omaha citizens in general. This document aims to remedy that lack of knowledge and provide guidance for both residents and non-residents as North Omaha faces its future.



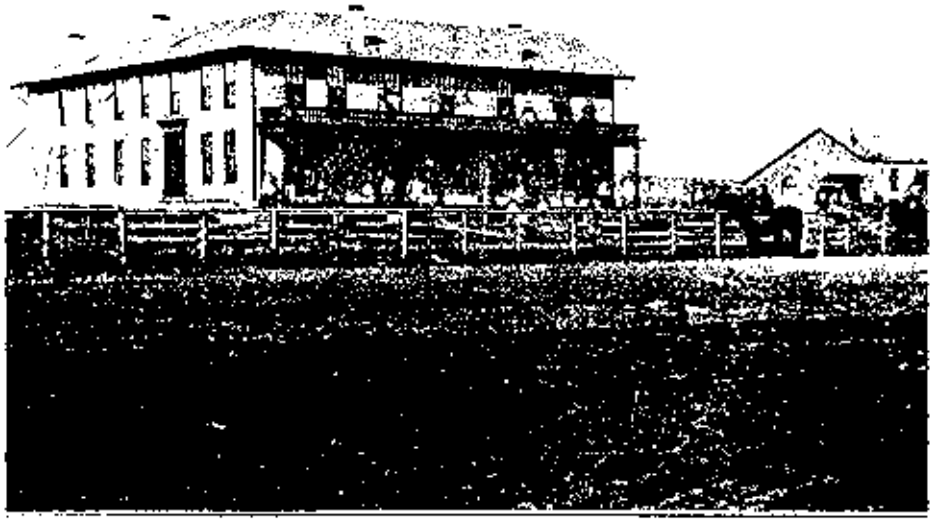
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1. **Brownell Hall (Former Central House Hotel), Saratoga, 1860's**

The Central House Hotel was the main building in the settlement of Saratoga, laid out between Omaha and Florence in 1856. The building later became Brownell Hall, an Episcopalian girl's school, and was moved into Omaha in 1868.

(Douglas County Historical Society)

II. A Brief History of North Omaha



BROWNELL HALL, 1863-1868, TWENTY-FOURTH AND GRAND AVENUE.

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2. John I. Redick House, 24th and Pratt Streets
Redick was one of the Omaha businessmen who lived on country estates in North Omaha in the late nineteenth century. Redick and his sons platted his land into subdivisions as the city grew out to it, and eventually donated the old Victorian house for use as the first University of Omaha in 1909.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)

3. John I. Redick, ca. 1888
(Omaha Public Library)

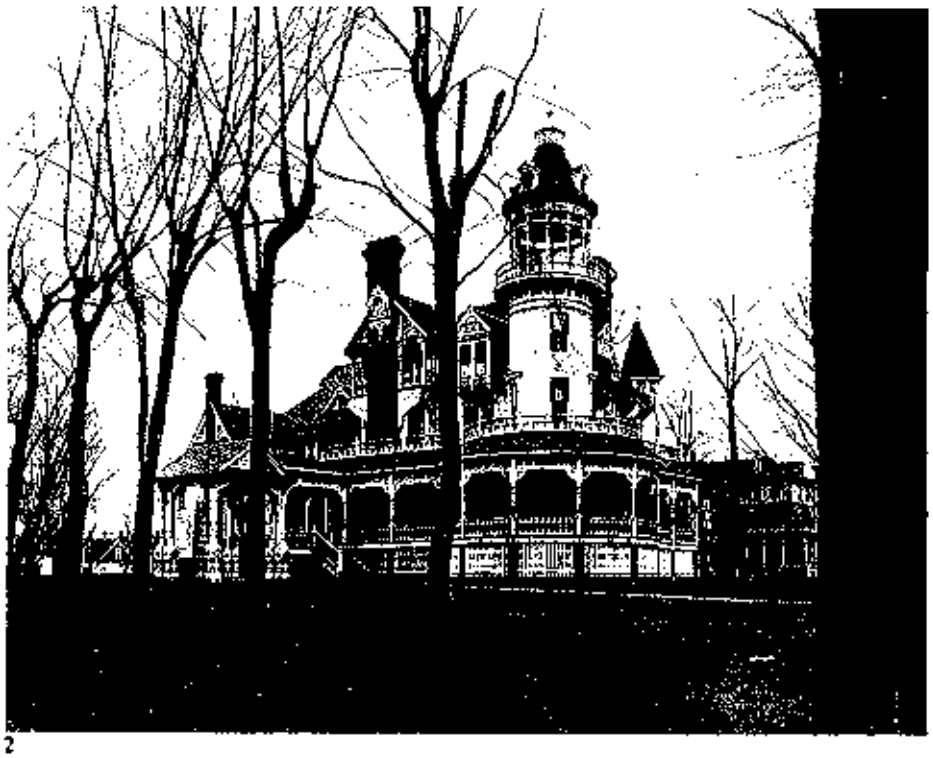
Urbanization and the First Wave of Settlement

Early Land Use

When Omaha was founded in 1854, the original city plat extended north only to Webster Street, far south of what is today North Omaha. For its first thirty years, what became North Omaha was comprised of relatively large tracts of land controlled by a few owners, with estates and business enterprises scattered throughout. The city boundaries were extended west to 36th and north to Pratt Street by 1869, but little construction occurred and North Omaha stayed rural in character until the 1880's.

There was one early, brief attempt at urban development, however. In 1856, just as Omaha was becoming a muddy shanty town, speculators laid out the settlement of Saratoga in North Omaha. Saratoga developed primarily because of a sulphur spring flowing out of the bluffs northeast of today's 16th and Locust Streets. The promoters named it after the New York health resort famous for its mineral spring water, hoping to attract attention to the settlement. Indeed, the village grew rapidly after its founding and soon included the "magnificent" Central House Hotel, a brickyard, a lumberyard, and a number of houses. A sawmill was built at the point on the Missouri River known as Saratoga Bend (now part of Carter Lake), which offered a fine landing suitable for all vessels. But Saratoga fell victim to unstable economic conditions. The Panic of 1857 caused the collapse of banking houses throughout the United States and Saratoga's stockholders lacked sufficient resources to support the town. When the neighboring communities of Omaha and Florence capitalized on the traffic created by the Colorado Gold Rush in 1859, Saratoga had no business places left and little means to build itself up again.[1]

The land on which Saratoga stood was not neglected for long. Episcopalian Bishop Joseph Talbot purchased the former Central House Hotel and converted it into Brownell Hall, a school for girls, in 1863. Within five years, the building was moved to 16th and Jones in Omaha and bankers Augustus and Herman Kountze acquired most of the land in the Saratoga vicinity. The flat North Omaha plain later held the Douglas County Fair Grounds and the Omaha Driving Park (a race track), before reaching its greatest achievement as the site for the Trans-Mississippi and International



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Exposition in 1898.[2]

The Kountze brothers were not the only large property owners in North Omaha. John A. Horbach, a pioneer who arrived in 1856, operated a freighting and commission business along with his real estate holdings. Horbach's land lay immediately north of the original city plat and included a tract east of 24th and north to Seward Street. Moses F. Shinn owned the quarter section northwest of 24th and Nicholas. Shinn, famous in Omaha as a "typical frontier preacher," also had somewhat of a reputation as a faith healer. Shinn's 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Additions were already platted in the 1870's and encompassed much of the area that was later known as Kellom Heights. Attorney John I. Redick owned property all over the city, but in North Omaha centered his holdings west of 24th Street and north of Bristol. He resided at 24th and Pratt in a fabulous eclectic Victorian home which eventually became the first University of Omaha. Several of Redick's seven sons were also active in real estate and platted later subdivisions in North Omaha.[3]

By the time Redick built his mansion in the 1880's he was one of the last big landowners to live on a country estate in that vicinity. His home on 24th Street diverged from the typical pattern in North Omaha, since Sherman Avenue (later North 16th



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Street) was the favored location for the splendid houses. Among the residents on Sherman Avenue was merchant James J. Brown, who operated one of the first dry goods and grocery stores in the city and was active in the organization of the Omaha National Bank, Omaha Loan and Trust Company, and an early street railway company. In addition, he served on the City Council and built the J. J. Brown building on the southeast corner of 16th and Douglas (razed 1980). Near the Brown residence was E. V. Smith's home at 1702 Grace, built about 1870. Smith, an early settler and city councilman in Omaha, platted an addition

1. Caroline Sears Poppleton, 1911
Mrs. Poppleton, wife of pioneer attorney A.J. Poppleton, remained in their North Omaha home near 16th and Grant until the teens. When their estate was platted, it became the subdivision of Victor Place.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)

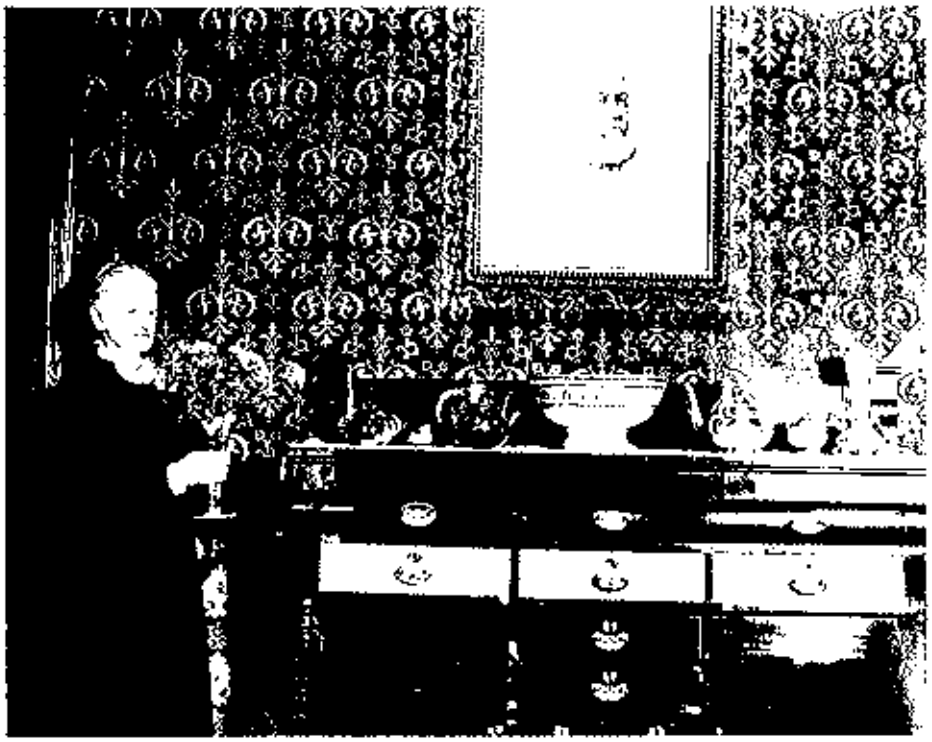
2. Poor Claires Monastery, 29th and Hamilton Streets, 1984
Located on one of the highest points in North Omaha, the monastery provided a home for the cloistered sisters for a century. Although the Poor Claires have recently moved, the buildings are still utilized as a convent.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

just south of his residence. In 1886 his three-story Romanesque stone mansion was sold to former Territorial Governor and U.S. Senator Alvin Saunders. In 1891 the home was the site of a reception for President Benjamin Harrison, whose son was married to Saunders' daughter. Another resident in the district was A. J. Poppleton, who moved to his estate, Elizabeth Place, at 16th and Grant in 1880. A pioneer attorney, Poppleton was well known for his service in the territorial legislature and also as the attorney for the Union Pacific Railroad from 1863 until 1888.[4]

While country estates stood along Sherman Avenue, North Omaha gained one of its first institutions on the hilly land of the southwest corner of the district. In 1878 John A. Creighton, local philanthropist, purchased six and a half acres atop Eden Hill between 28th and 30th, Caldwell to Hamilton. Creighton befriended the Poor Claires, a society of nuns dedicated to a strictly cloistered life, and built them a monastery on the land. When construction began on Eden Hill in 1880, the site was described as "on an eminence that commanded a view of both Omaha and the Missouri River." The sisters took up residence in 1882 and established a "strict canonical enclosure," prohibiting contact with the outside world. When the Poor Claires celebrated their Silver Jubilee in 1903, Creighton replaced the previous monastery with a new one, enabling the sisters to maintain their life of solitude.[5]

Expansion in the 1880's

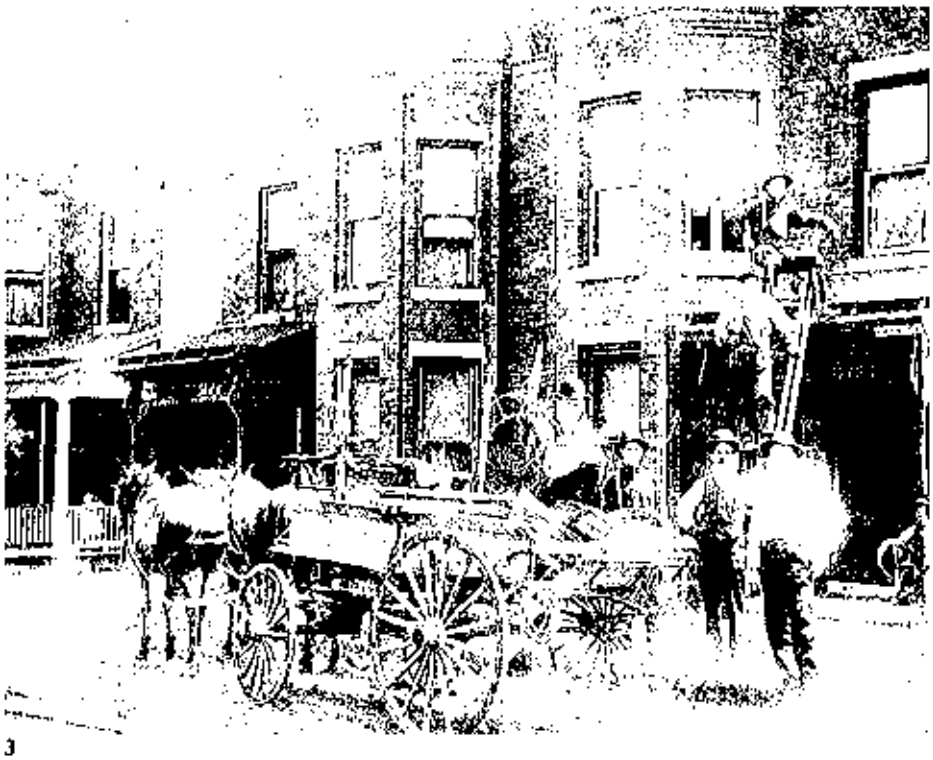
The 1880's brought the first large-scale residential subdivision development of North Omaha, reflecting expansion throughout the city in wholesaling, manufacturing and construction. As its population tripled from 30,815 in 1880 to 102,000 ten years later, Omaha was transformed from a frontier settlement to a modern, metropolitan city. Building values revealed the city's rapid growth, increasing from less than $1,000,000 in 1880 to $8,000,000 by the end of the decade. In 1880 the U.S. Census showed 5,110 dwellings in the city. In the next two years another 1,000 went up, and in 1887, at the height of the boom, 2,179 houses were constructed. During those ten years of growth and expansion, Omaha gained its reputation as a commercial center and became widely known for the Union Stockyards Company and resulting meatpacking center that created Omaha's satellite suburb,


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3. **Installation of Telephone Wire on Lake Street**
As new subdivisions were laid out and settled, amenities such as telephone service followed
(Douglas County Historical Society)

4. **Bird's Eye View of Downtown Omaha from the High School, 1897**
Omaha's growth decade of the 1880's brought not only an increase in population, but in business as well. Based on railroad connections to the west, the wholesaling business became a thriving element of downtown commerce.
(Nebraska State Historical Society)



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South Omaha. While the development of South Omaha did not directly affect the expansion into North Omaha, the wholesaling and manufacturing industries did. The wholesale district was centered in an area south of Harney and east of 12th Street on the edge of downtown and near the rail lines that ran along the Missouri River. Wholesalers built warehouses in the late 1870's and construction continued for two decades, creating a commercial area with firms specializing in wholesale dry goods, hardware, groceries, liquors, and numerous other products. As downtown business expanded and moved into old residential areas, North Omaha became a convenient location for new housing construction.[6]

North Omaha already had a few platted subdivisions aimed at residential settlement by 1880. Most had been laid out in the flurry of post-Civil War growth in 1869 and 1870, with almost no activity in the following decade. These subdivisions were primarily concentrated in the southern portion of the area with John A. Horbach's and E. V. Smith's Additions filling much of the land east of 24th and south of Yates Street. Horbach refused to plat one large L-shaped area between 20th and 24th Streets because of litigation, and it became a market garden and circus ground (and eventually the site of the Logan Fontenelle Homes). Northwest of 24th and Nicholas, Shinn's and Parker's Additions filled an entire quarter section of land.[7]

Patterns on the Land

Even as early as the 1880's, decisions were being made that would affect the appearance of North Omaha 100 years later. The methods by which land was originally sold and subdivided created the pattern of streets, blocks and occasionally, the density of construction that still defines the neighborhood's limits and the various portions that comprise it. Thus the plans and ideas of individual landowners such as Shinn, Horbach and Smith outlined the character of the neighborhood and helped determine the ways North Omaha would develop.

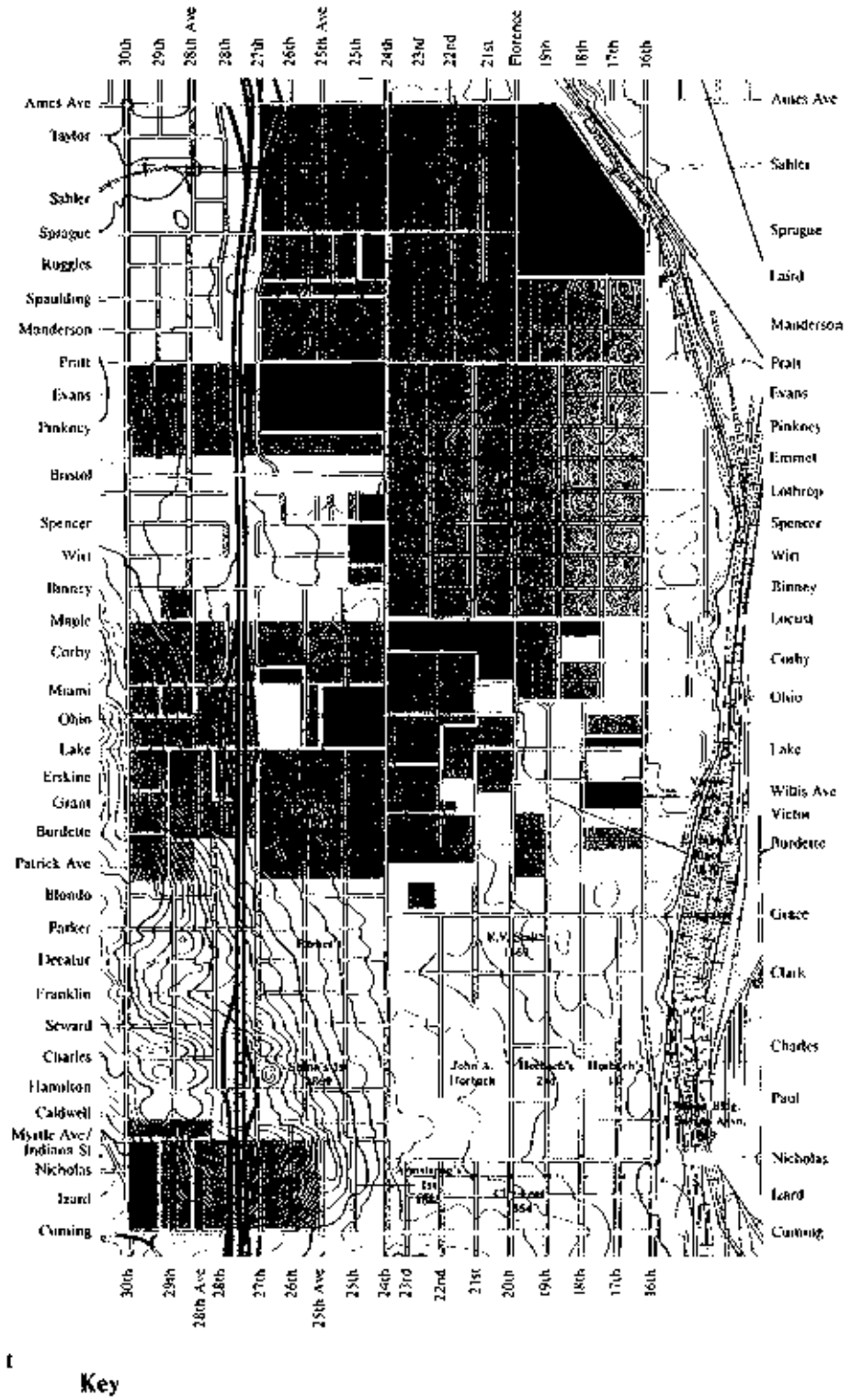
The subdivision of land in North Omaha followed precedents first established under the Land Ordinance of 1785, the basis for the settlement of United States land. Beginning with territory outside the original 13 colonies, Congress required a rectangular survey of the land, dividing it into townships six miles square. A township was composed of 36 sections, each of 640 acres of land, with each section divided into four

quarter sections of 160 acres. This grid pattern, imposed on the land without regard for mountain, river or plain, often determined boundary lines for land purchases.[8] In North Omaha, 16th, 24th and 30th Streets formed the edges of quarter sections, and since they were usually the edge of property lines as well, they became main traveled streets.

Subdivision layout also tended to follow section lines. Because one east-west section line lay midway between Nicholas and Paul Streets, the blocks facing on Nicholas followed the layout of the original city plat, while those facing Paul took on the characteristics of Horbach's Addition. West of 24th Street, Shinn's and Parker's Additions followed a platting formation of 12 and 14 lots per block, while Nelson's Addition in the next quarter section south had long elongated blocks with 24 lots per block. Nelson's Addition no doubt followed that layout because of the steep terrain in that vicinity, with increasing elevations north of Cuming Street.[9]

The number of landowners in a particular area also affected the layout of the land. Shinn's and Parker's subdivisions were laid out entirely in blocks of lots with a 60-foot frontage, providing a regularity of streets and block size. However, none of that uniformity appeared east of 24th Street, where a number of small landowners each platted their property according to their own ideas. Few east-west streets were established, and those that were did not match streets west of 24th Street. E. V. Smith and John Horbach laid out elongated north-south blocks, thus emphasizing 18th, 19th and 20th Streets. In 1884, the quarter section just north of Yates Street east of 24th Street was carved up among no fewer than 25 owners. As the owners platted each piece, the resulting layout created new streets that failed to meet existing streets and provided no uniformity of blocks or subdivisions.[10]

One other decision by a landowner was the number of lots established per block. These varied from the tiny 24-foot frontage lots laid out by the Omaha Building and Loan Association at 17th and Nicholas to the more regular 50-and 60-foot lots in E. V. Smith's Addition. The size of lot dictated the size of the house that could be built on it; thus the property owner established a standard for the status of his subdivision with his original plat. Except for a few isolated pockets and along Florence Boulevard, most of the land south of Lake Street



1. North Omaha Subdivisions by Date of Platting

This patchwork of subdivision plats illustrates how the decisions made by developers affected the landscape. Note how the land was generally divided at quarter-section lines (24th Street, Yates, Locust, and Pratt Streets) and the regularity of blocks and streets in larger subdivisions such as Kountze Place and Shinn's Addition. (Omaha City Planning Department)

2. Herman Kountze, ca. 1888
Kountze, one of the city's biggest landowners, purchased the land that had been Saratoga and platted his Kountze Place subdivision in the 1880's. He donated land on the northern edge of his property for the Trans-Mississippi Exposition, land which later became Kountze (Malcolm X) Park.
(Omaha Public Library)

Kountze Place

In Omaha the general pattern of movement for the well-to-do has always been toward the West. Beginning with the earliest settlers on Capitol Hill and the bluffs west of downtown, successive generations have jumped to Park Avenue and the West Farnam-Cathedral area, Happy Hollow and Fairacres, and today's Regency-Rockbrook vicinity. Perhaps the most notable exception to that trend was the development of Kountze Place north of the city center in the 1880's.

The community was founded as a suburb by Herman Kountze, an early settler who helped build Omaha from a prairie village into a city. Kountze was president of the First National Bank, founded with his brothers, and was active in developing real estate subdivisions throughout the expanding area. He bought land in North Omaha as early as the 1860's, but the city did not catch up to it until the real estate boom of the 1880's, when streetcar lines made it possible for people who worked downtown to live in country suburbs.

When Kountze subdivided his 160 acres between 16th and 24th Streets from Locust to Pratt and offered lots for sale, the cornfields of North Omaha began to give way to housing, with one of the first dwellings built on Binney Street in 1886. The following two years witnessed rapid growth with approximately thirty new homes appearing in the development each year, concentrated on the southernmost streets. By 1890, Binney and Wirt held the majority of homes in Kountze Place, with another large representation located on Emmet and Pinkney.

From the beginning Kountze Place attracted the rising upper middle class — successful businessmen, particularly real estate men, and professionals such as lawyers, doctors, and architects. But even these fairly well-to-do individuals stopped building during the nationwide depression of the 1890's. Between 1891 and 1901, fewer than a dozen homes went up in Kountze Place. Very little construction occurred anywhere in the decade, and especially not in a new development at the end of the streetcar lines.

The North Omaha neighborhood received a boost with the decision to hold the 1898 Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition on a portion of the development directly north of Pinkney Street. Herman Kountze donated large open sections of his subdivision for a lagoon surrounded by a stunning "White City" that recalled the formal grandeur of the Renaissance and ancient Greece and Rome. In this fantasy world of purity and order, Midwesterners who had seen little but crop failures, burning heat, and business stagnation for almost a decade found a vision of the city that influenced Omaha building for the next twenty years.

The actual structures of the Exposition, majestic but temporary, were made of plaster of paris and horsehair, and in 1899 they were demolished. Some of the remains were pushed into the lagoon, which was filled in to create Kountze Park between Pinkney and Pratt, from 19th to 21st. In the years following, the area around the park began to be built up as Omahans were drawn to the part of the city that had attracted over two-and-a-half million visitors. Impact was not immediate in Kountze Place, but as the economy gained strength, home construction began to increase there after 1902. New homes went up on Binney and Wirt in the early years of the 1900's and then gradually shifted to streets farther north, particularly Spencer, Lothrop, Emmet, and Pinkney. Evans and Pratt Streets, filling the rest of the tract, began to attract new houses after 1910. By 1925 all of Kountze Place was filled with single family homes, churches, and a few multi-unit dwellings.

In the suburb's Victorian heyday, Kountze Place exhibited some of the most fashionable architecture in the city. Many of the residents hired architects to design their homes, especially along Binney, Wirt, Emmet, and Pinkney Streets, and some of the city's leading architects chose to live there themselves. Henry Voss, who designed distinguished houses in Kountze Place, made his own home at 1818 Wirt Street from 1888 to 1893. All three principals in the architectural firm of Mendelssohn, Fisher, and Lawrie also lived in the suburb and designed important buildings there. Louis Mendelssohn built a home with fourteen rooms and four baths at 2111 Emmet in 1888 and lived there until he sold it, by 1892, to George Joslyn, president of the



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was laid out for homes of the middle and working classes.

While new subdivisions were platted throughout the decade in North Omaha, the bulk of activity occurred after 1885. At least 25 new subdivisions were laid out between 1882 and 1885, but 20 in 1886 and 24 in 1887 revealed the high point of the real estate boom. Another 14 were laid out before Omahans experienced the full extent of the 1890's depression.[11]

The number of available residences in Omaha increased throughout the decade, as witnessed by newspaper ads in the early years which offered mostly vacant property, rather than homes for sale or rent. By 1885 the vacant property had begun to fill up with houses, which then provided the bulk of advertisements. Between 1885 and 1890 some 9,000 dwellings were added to the city. At the same time prices increased with lots that had sold for $300 at the beginning of the decade selling at $750 to $1,300 by the peak of the boom in 1887.[12]

In general, the 1880's was a seller's market in Omaha, with the demand for housing always overwhelming the supply. Not only did the population of the city increase threefold, but this population was continually on the move, changing residence frequently. A sample of Omahans between 1883 and 1888 revealed that some 75 percent of them changed residence in the period. When they moved, Omahans often preferred single family dwellings near streetcar lines, even if they had to move out some distance to secure such residences.[13]

While most of North Omaha 1880's settlement was concentrated in the additions

1. Binney Street, Looking East at 21st, 1896
As one of the first developed streets in Kountze Place, Binney Street attracted many of the grand Queen Anne style homes built in the 1880's and 1890's. At left is the Bay-Fry house (now Queen Anne Manor) opposite Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church (now Church of the Living God). (Omaha Public Library)

2. Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Florence Boulevard and Spencer Streets, 1926
After the Seminary closed in 1943, the building was converted to apartments and the grounds utilized for the new Garden Apartments. The Seminary building was razed after a fire in the 1980's while the Garden Apartments have been rehabilitated into the Horizon Townhomes. (Nebraska State Historical Society)



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laid out since 1870, one area stood in marked contrast to the other subdivisions. In the quarter section of land that had been a portion of Saratoga, Herman Kountze platted Kountze Place between Locust and Pratt, 16th to 24th. Unlike the other subdivisions, Kountze Place was aimed at the upper middle class professional and businessman rather than the more typical working and middle class residents. Kountze insured the level of status in his subdivision through deed restrictions stipulating the minimum cost of a dwelling and its distance from the street, and prohibited any "immoral, disreputable or illegal business" or sale of any "spirituous or malt liquor" in the subdivision. Such restrictions were common in developing 1880's neighborhoods that sought to limit the number of people who could afford to settle there. Kountze also took steps to encourage the construction of churches in his subdivision, donating lots to congregations provided they built structures of a specified minimum cost and used stone or brick as construction material. Some 75 dwellings were erected in Kountze Place in the late 1880's, mostly on Binney, Wirt and Spencer Streets. Unlike those of other North Omaha neighborhoods, these structures were often architect designed and displayed the reigning high style architectural fashions of the day.[14]

The Role of the Builder-Developer

While Kountze Place had the high style, elaborate homes created by locally renowned architects, most North Omahans lived in houses designed by building contractors or erected by them from any number of nineteenth century housing pattern books. The pattern books, along with balloon frame construction methods developed earlier in the century, allowed building contractors to take on large-scale housing projects for the first time in history,

Western Newspaper Union. (Joslyn, befitting his position as a power in Omaha's leadership circles, later built himself a Scottish Baronial castle.) Harry Lawrie built his house across the street from Mendelssohn at 2112 Emmet by 1890 and remained there almost twenty-five years. Their partner George Fisher lived at 1622 Lothrop for almost twenty years.

Among the community's prominent businessmen in the Victorian period was Christian Specht, owner of the Western Cornice Works Company and later a city councilman, who lived at 2004 Wirt from 1888 until the mid-1890's. The vice-president of the large firm of Kilpatrick-Koch Dry Goods Company, Allen Koch, resided at 2120 Wirt during the early 1890's. Allen T. Rector, of Rector and Wilhelmy wholesale hardware, made his home at 1802 Binney after 1888. John Bay, partner in Bay and Fitch Real Estate and owner of the Crystal Ice Company, built one of the area's large Victorian houses in 1887 at 2024 Binney.

Thomas Fry, who bought Bay's grand home in 1901, was typical of the civic leaders who came to prominence during the depression of the 1890's and the recovery that followed. Fry organized the Fry Shoe Company in 1902 and was president of the Drexel Shoe Company, president of the Nebraska Savings and Loan Company, and a director of U.S. National Bank. One of the original twelve organizers of Ak-Sar-Ben in 1895, Fry served as president of its Board of Governors for nine years. In 1902 the organization named him the eighth King of Ak-Sar-Ben. Fry was a perfect example of the second generation of Omaha leadership; in contrast to the pioneers who had laid out the city and developed it in grand land schemes, Omaha's influentials after the turn of the century were executives and professional men who provided guidance for the city through active civic work.

Among the Kountze Place professionals who displayed this kind of influence was William A. Redick of 2120 Emmet Street. The son of pioneer John I. Redick, William was a lawyer until 1904, then a district court judge. In the 1912 city election he led a "good government" group soundly defeated by incumbent Mayor Dahlman's ticket, which was backed by Tom Dennison's political machine.

Kountze Place also counted an active politician among its residents: Charles Otto Lobeck, whose career from the 1880's to 1918 encompassed the offices of state senator, city councilman, city comptroller, and Republican congressman. Lobeck lived at 1811 Spencer until his death in 1920.

After 1900 the continuing westward movement of Omaha's upper middle class had its effect, and the builders of big houses began to concentrate outside of Kountze Place. At the same time, salesmen, insurance agents, and operators of small businesses began to move into Kountze Place, along with a sprinkling of clerks and blue collar workers. Consequently, many of the structures built in the neighborhood during this period were vernacular middle class dwellings. These comfortable houses were designed in subdued Classical Revival and bungalow styles more in keeping with twentieth century taste than the exuberant Victoran styles of the 1880's. Mixed in with them

3. Wirt Street, View West from 22nd, 1982
The spindly young saplings of the 1880's have grown into the large trees that shade the streets of Kountze Place and contribute to the neighborhood's character.
(Omaha City Planning Department)



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were large, high style homes, which continued to appear in Kountze Place until 1910.

Among the builders of grand houses after 1900 was George Shepard, a marble cutter by trade. Shepard operated a monuments business, managed apartments, and devoted the last thirty years of his life to painting, photography, and music. His oil paintings showed a knowledge of the classical tradition in art, evident also in the house he designed for himself in 1903 at 1802 Wirt Street.

Charles Storz was a post-1900 resident who hired architects Fisher and Lawrie to design his home. Storz had come to Omaha from Germany in 1882 with his brother Gottlieb, who founded the nationally known Storz Brewing Company. In 1894 Charles built a bar and restaurant next to the brewery on North 16th Street and dispensed Storz beer there for over thirty-five years. During this period, in 1909, he built a striking house at 1901 Wirt Street.

While Kountze Place developed primarily as a residential suburb, it also held the Presbyterian Theological Seminary and a large number of churches. Most of these structures were designed by the popular firm of Fisher and Lawrie. The Seminary, founded in 1891 to provide pastors for the small towns of the Midwest, purchased two full blocks between Emmet and Spencer Streets and by 1904 erected a Fisher and Lawrie building that housed the school's classrooms and dormitory. An indication of the neighborhood's support for the Seminary occurred in 1922 when a movement began to relocate the school to another section of the city. Kountze Place residents joined to protest the change and succeeded in keeping the institution until it closed in 1943.

The Seminary students were no doubt served by the First United Presbyterian Church, across the street at 2108 Emmet. The congregation, organized in 1868, built this "handsome and convenient" $15,000 church in 1890. It was designed by Mendelssohn, Fisher, and Lawrie with a seating capacity of seven hundred. By the 1920's, when the Seminary was considering relocation, the church considered it also, as its members increasingly were moving outside of Kountze Place. In 1928 the congregation merged with Central United Presbyterian and sold its building on Emmet to the First Foursquare Gospel Church.

Another early church in Kountze Place was Trinity Methodist Episcopal, designed by George Fisher and built at 21st and Binney in 1887. Kountze sold the two lots to the Methodists for one dollar with the provision that they utilize the land for church purposes and build a structure worth at least $10,000. The 1913 Easter Sunday tornado swept through the southeast corner of Kountze Place and partially demolished Trinity, but the minister and members of the congregation made enough repairs to the church to hold services in it the following Sunday.

Kountze Place was also home to Sacred Heart Church, organized in 1890 to serve Catholics living north of Holy Family parish. The congregation moved from its first location at 26th and Sprague, where the surrounding area remained undeveloped and the church building flooded every time it rained, to two lots donated by Herman Kountze at 22nd and Binney. There the congregation built a Fisher and Lawrie-designed stone church between 1900 and 1902. By 1904 the Dominican Sisters had taken over all educational needs of the parish, establishing elementary and secondary schools on corners opposite the church.

Plymouth Congregational Church had two homes in Kountze Place. The first was on land donated by Herman Kountze at 20th and Spencer for a building designed by George Fisher and constructed in 1889; the second, at 18th and Emmet, was designed by Harry Lawrie and constructed in 1914. The congregation stayed at 1802 Emmet for forty-six years, selling its building in 1961 to Primm Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

North Presbyterian Church was founded in 1908 with the merger of two North Side churches, Knox Presbyterian and Second Presbyterian. Their impressive building at 24th and Wirt was constructed in 1910 for $50,000. Immanuel Baptist Church first met at 24th and Binney after its organization in 1888, then built a structure at 24th and Pinkney. One other church in the neighborhood was the First Universal Church at the corner of 19th and Lothrop, built for $15,000 in the 1890's.

erecting an entire street or subdivision of homes in one year. With new building technology at hand, the home builder became another individual decisionmaker in producing the landscape of North Omaha.

Builders played a variety of roles in developing the landscape. Some worked for property developers or landowners as home builders, probably depending on a plan book or architect's drawing for guidance. Others built residences in scattered locations, but perhaps relied on a particular style or design in their construction. The builders that exerted the most influence were those that assumed the role of property owner or developer themselves, purchasing land and erecting houses on it. The builder with the financial capability to develop a subdivision like Kountze Place was quite rare in North Omaha; consequently builder's subdivisions tended to be small and were generally located in quarter sections where the land had been chopped into a number of pieces in previous decades.[15]

All these types of builders were participants in the real estate boom. Curtis W. Cain developed Cain Place on the south side of Locust Street from 21st to 24th, then built most of the houses in the small subdivision based on plans drawn by local architects. Wilson's Addition to Kountze Place, a small subdivision between 25th and 26th, Miami and Corby, contained 12 houses erected by builder Amos Phillips. Fred Christianson erected about 20 structures in North Omaha in the boom years, but rarely more than two in any location. The partnership of Latey and Benson erected some 20 houses along North 21st Street and in the 2100 blocks of Grant and Burdette, all in 1887. William Latey and William Benson were Union Pacific Railroad workers who entered the construction business in 1886, no doubt to take advantage of the real estate boom. While Benson

1. Grant Street, View West Toward 22nd, 1984
The partnership of Latey and Benson constructed vernacular houses with some Queen Anne details in the 1880's.
(Omaha City Planning Department)
2. Conductors Bert P. Buone and Billie Bell on the Hanscom Park — North 24th Streetcar Line, ca. 1890
Streetcars provided convenient transportation



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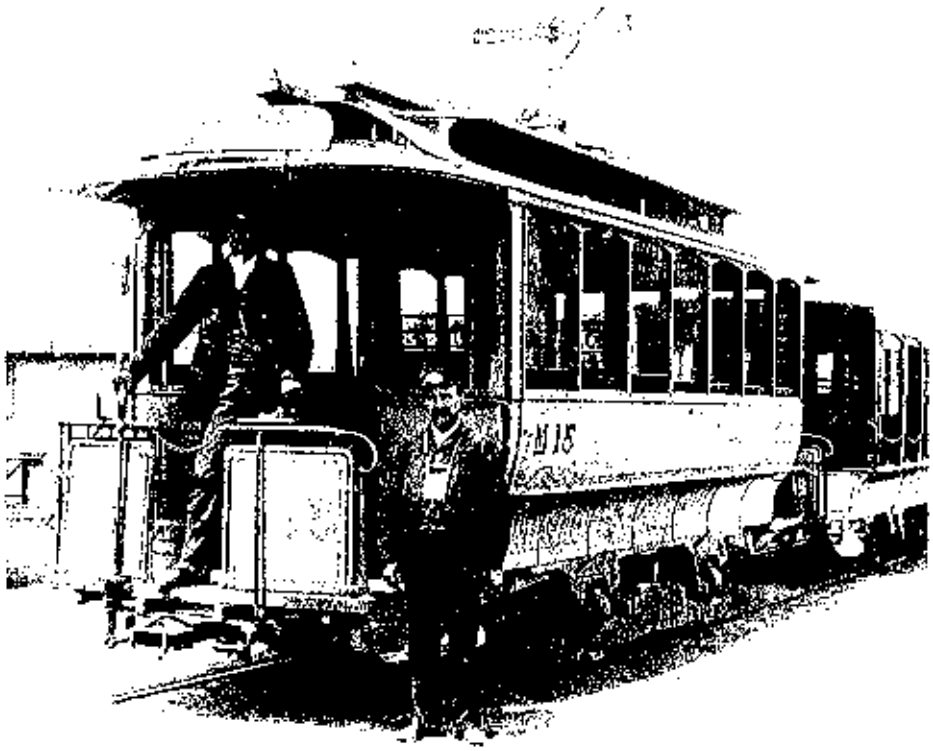
was a carpenter, Latey had previously run a grocery store along with his railroad work. The two maintained the partnership for several years, then split by 1890. Latey and Benson clearly determined the character of the area they developed, fitting houses onto 29-and 36-foot lots on North 21st and two houses on each 50-foot lot on Grant Street.[16]

Residential Styles and Types — 1880's

Because of the significant role played by the builder-developer, it is not surprising that most houses built in North Omaha were vernacular in style. These vernacular types varied from adaptations of the high styles of the day to small worker's cottages. In many cases the builder began with a standard plan but added elements from other styles that personalized each structure. Thus the vernacular cottage could appear in a simple, pared-down form with little ornament, or in a more elaborate version with Eastlake porches or other decorative touches.

The basic form of North Omaha vernacular housing in the 1880's was the one- or one-and-a-half story cottage, rectangular in massing with the narrower gable end facing the street. The very simplest version had only a small decorative window in the attic story. Later adaptations of this type expanded the attic story and included a larger, functional window or two, or a decorative dormer. An open porch usually ran across the front of the structure. The most unpretentious of these buildings were patterned by the builder himself; as the design grew more elaborate an architect was more likely to have created the plans. This form provided the basis of 1880's construction and continued into the twentieth century, although new vernacular types would supplement the one-story cottage after 1900.[17]

In general, relatively few styles exemplified housing in most of Omaha. With no zoning or subdivision laws such uniformity came from more informal regulations of



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The Role of Transportation Lines

In the expansion of Omaha and particularly the North Side in the 1880's, a significant factor was the development of public transit systems. Availability of streetcars helped determine both the sequence and time period in which various subdivisions were laid out and attracted residents. Before the widespread use of streetcars, urban dwellers necessarily lived close to their jobs and walked to work. Only wealthy men like Redick, Poppleton and Brown could afford to have estates in the country and drive a carriage in to work each day. But the development of transit systems during the last half of the nineteenth century made it easier to separate places of employment and residence. Workers no longer needed to live near the factory or above their store, but instead resided in the newly developed suburbs, in their own home or perhaps in a new apartment building.[1]

The streetcars did not exert this effect in Omaha on a large scale until the 1880's. The first efforts at public transportation in the city began with a horsecar line in 1868. The system expanded threefold in the next decade, with a line running west on Cuming to 24th and then north to Hamilton Street. The 1874 State Fair, held on land between Laird and Boyd Streets west of 16th, stimulated the construction of one-and-a-half miles of track on 18th from Cass to Ohio Street. The company believed this line to be a fine addition since it passed the Baumann Brewery beer garden, "whose patrons were numerous enough to make that extension profitable even when the fair was not operating." The horsecar line was responsible for later tracks as well: a line north on 20th to Lake, north on 26th from Seward to Lake, and along Lake Street. A horsecar barn had been built at 21st and Cuming early in the 1870's; a new car barn was erected at 26th and Lake in 1887.[2]

By the 1880's horsecars were becoming out-of-date, and a new electric car line was organized to compete with the horsecar line. Organized in 1887 under the leadership of former Union Pacific Railroad physician Samuel Mercer, the Omaha Motor Railway ran north on 22nd to Charles, then west to 25th and north to Lake Street. Another popular route began at 22nd and Ames and traveled east toward Commercial Avenue and south on Sherman to downtown. Competition among the various transit

that enabled Omahans to move out from downtown in the 1880's.
(Douglas County Historical Society)

3. Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Carbarn, 26th and Lake Streets, 1980
Carbarns were located around the city for storage and maintenance of streetcars. This structure is one of the few carbarns still standing in Omaha.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

companies was fierce, and Mercer's workers laid track at night to keep up with the horsecars and another cable company in the city. Omahans criticized Mercer as "a dangerous opportunist" and complained about his overhead electric wires, but his motor railway proved to be the wave of the future. In 1889 the city's various transit companies were united into one organization which soon electrified all the lines. Thus by 1891 North Omaha was well served with streetcar lines on all the major streets: Sherman, 24th, 30th north of Binney, Cuming, Lake and Ames.[3]

The system continued to grow throughout the following decades. A new brick car barn designed by the renowned local architectural firm of Fisher and Lawrie was built at 24th and Ames in 1898. The large structure was located at an important transfer point and held as many as 90 cars on 11 tracks in its heyday. The horsecar barn at 26th and Lake was later replaced by a brick car building and general repair shop, also designed by Fisher and Lawrie, in 1905. Located on a tract of ground two blocks square, the land at 26th and Lake became an important part of the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company. The main building contained the machine shop and forge room as well as a separate space for painting and woodworking. Other buildings on the grounds contained offices, drafting rooms and a power substation which supplied motorcars with electricity.[4]

For a brief period in the late 1880's North Omaha also had a commuter rail line to transport residents around the city. The Belt Line Railroad, built by the Missouri Pacific, utilized a station at 15th and Webster as the beginning of its commuter trips. The train stopped at Oak Chatham (a subdivision southeast of 24th and Ames), Walnut Hill (northwest of 40th and Cuming), and Westside (southwest of 48th and Pacific). Regular trips began on July 15, 1888, with fares offered in 10, 30, 50 and 100 trip prices. An 1890's booster booklet suggested a Belt Line trip "to get the best impression of the extension of the city in all directions." The commuter function soon ended, however, and the Belt Line generally served freight and industrial traffic thereafter.[5]

The fact that the car lines ringed North Omaha contributed to the settlement of the area by making it convenient for residents to ride to work. Similarly the placement of car lines nearby also established the area as available for working and middle class families who necessarily located near public transit as they moved out of downtown housing locations.

Closely paralleling the development of neighborhoods and the public transit system was the paving of streets. Since the early days of settlement, Omaha streets had carved their own distinctive place in the city's history as bottomless pits of mire and muck. As a result, a hard-surfaced road was almost a necessity for efficient settlement of any particular district. In North Omaha these streets were even more specific in identifying the earliest areas of construction than were the streetcar lines. The roadways paved by 1890 were concentrated in the southeastern section of North Omaha in some of the subdivisions platted in the 1870's. Sherman Avenue, which was gradually beginning to change from a street with a few large residential structures to a major commercial artery, was covered with cedar block paving northward to Wirt Street. In 1890, Wirt, one of the first developed streets in Kountze Place, provided a cedar block connector between 16th and 24th. Grace, Clark and Lake, the main streets that ran between 16th and 24th, were also surfaced at an early date. Another early north-south route was 18th Street from Cuming to Ohio, paved because of its use as an early horse car route. As 24th Street began to develop into a commercial area, and later as the main street on the North Side, it too was one of the early asphalt streets. Bristol and Spaulding became connections between 24th and 30th, with the latter reaching farther west to the Belt Line, undoubtedly to facilitate the development of industry in that area.[6]

By the turn of the century, surfacing of the main streets such as 16th, Ames, and 30th, and a few residential streets scattered throughout the neighborhood had been completed. By 1914 the growth of the first decade of the century prompted paving in those subdivisions that had filled in rapidly, such as Parker's and Shinn's Additions, Kountze Place and Bedford Place. Areas with unimproved roads on the eve of the first world war had been skipped over in some cases and were not yet fully developed.[7]



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standards. Sam Bass Warner, in an analysis of suburban development in nineteenth century Boston, pointed out that general building practices kept an area "architecturally and economically homogenous." New home owners and builders alike "sought safety for their investment by building dwellings of a type common to the area." This ensured some uniformity in style and income categories in a neighborhood until radical changes occurred to upset the balance. In addition, builders were usually quite conservative in style and restricted themselves to only a few housing plans and a limited price range of construction. When their specialty was no longer an accepted style in a neighborhood, they often moved to another area rather than change their style.[8]

While Warner's analysis focused on builders in suburban Boston, similar practices generally held true with Omaha builders. Certainly they faced the same constraints and problems and during the boom of the 1880's it would have been easy for them to work throughout the city, constructing their houses in a variety of neighborhoods. While there is no definitive analysis of Omaha building practices, it is apparent that some builders erected a wide variety of houses for all classes. Fred Christianson built cottages for as little as $700 but also constructed the Charles Storz mansion at 19th and Wirt for $7,500. Builder Milton Roys directed his construction toward a particular income group. Most of Roys' structures in North Omaha were in the wealthy suburb of Kountze Place and cost between $3,500 and $7,000.[9] Because Kountze Place was aimed at a higher income resident than most sections of North Omaha, its architect-designed houses set the tone for popular styles of the 1880's.

Certainly the most popular style among the upper middle class Kountze Place residents was the Queen Anne. With an irregular shape and an astounding level of

1. Bay-Fry House, 2024 Binney, ca. 1910
Built in 1887 for businessman John P. Bay, this grand Queen Anne style residence was the height of architectural fashion in the Kountze Place neighborhood. The house was purchased in 1901 by Thomas Fry, a civic leader and King of Ak-Sar-Ben who typified the rising upper middle class homeowners in the subdivision at the turn of the century.
(Douglas County Historical Society)

2. Streetcar Lines in North Omaha, 1891-1923
Streetcar lines not only spurred residential development throughout North Omaha by the 1890's but also helped determine the location of major commercial areas.
(Omaha City Planning Department)



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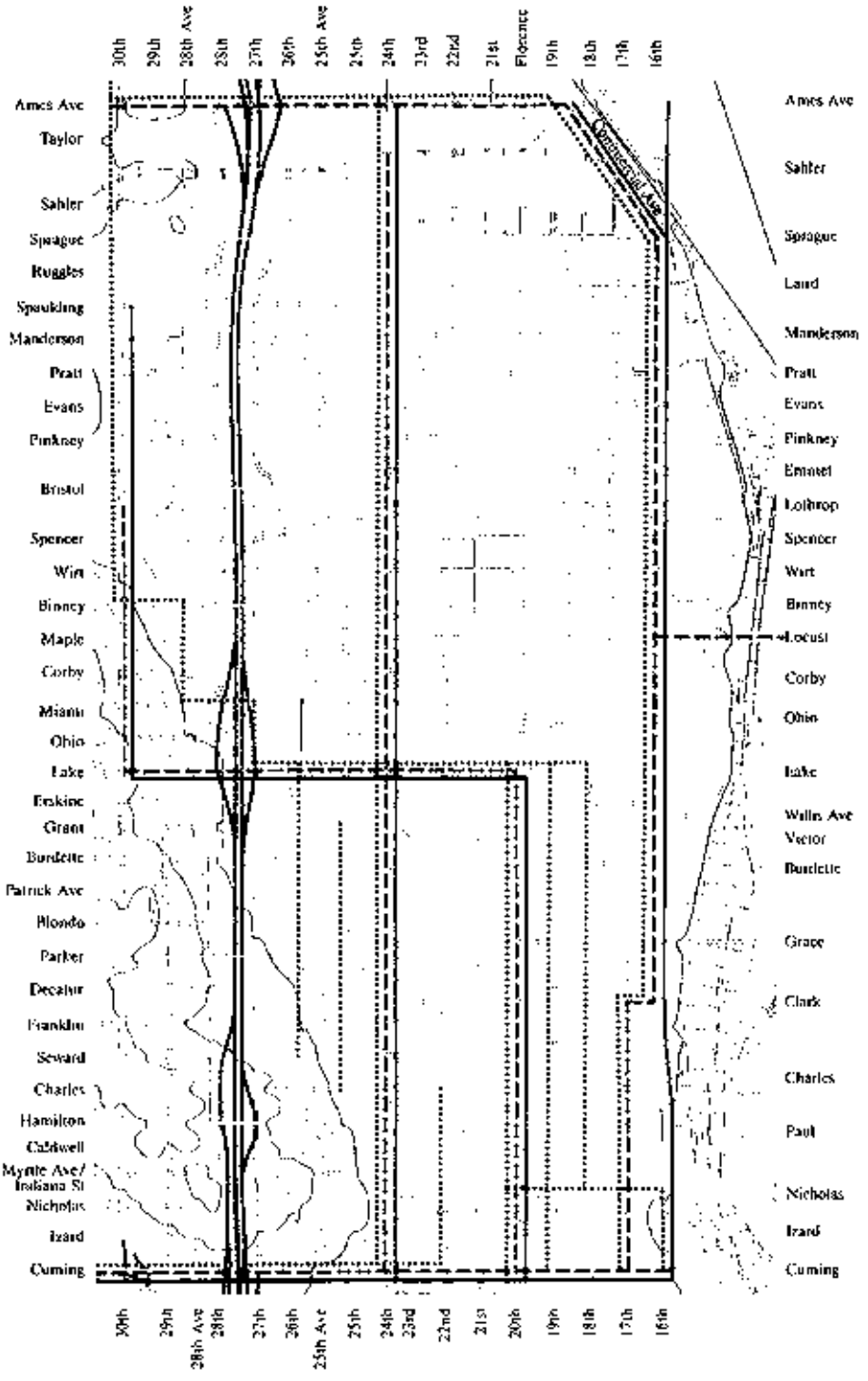
details and trims, the Queen Anne was not only a housing style but a social statement. Community leaders believed that their homes should reflect their social status. The Queen Anne typified the ostentatious display of Victorian life, with its variety of architectural details such as corner towers, wrap-around porches, elaborate stained glass windows and numerous dormers.[20]

As soon as Queen Annes appeared, however, bits and pieces of the style filtered down to less grand, but still substantial, housing. A dormer window or a corner tower might be all that signified this touch of elegance, but such elements were the builders' recognition of current architectural fashion. Thus high style details adorned vernacular housing and appeared on dwellings on other more middle class streets such as Spaulding and Manderson west of 24th, as they were built up in the 1880's.[21]

The First Immigrants

In the development of North Omaha, the first landowners' subdivision of property and the architects and builders who followed all affected the look of the landscape. They, in turn, were followed by residents who chose to make their home in the area. Over the past century, the district has been characterized by a continual movement of people through it, by residents who moved farther north and west to newer and better housing stock, and by succeeding waves of immigrant ethnic groups as they made their way in America. The people enriched the existing structure of subdivisions, streets, and houses, adding their own distinctive cultural contributions to the district.

Omaha's population has always included a wide variety of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, dating back to 1860 when some 40 percent of the 1,600 residents were



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Key

Streetcar lines in 1891
Streetcar lines in 1897
Streetcar lines in 1923

3. Woodman and Ritchie Company, 17th and Izard Streets

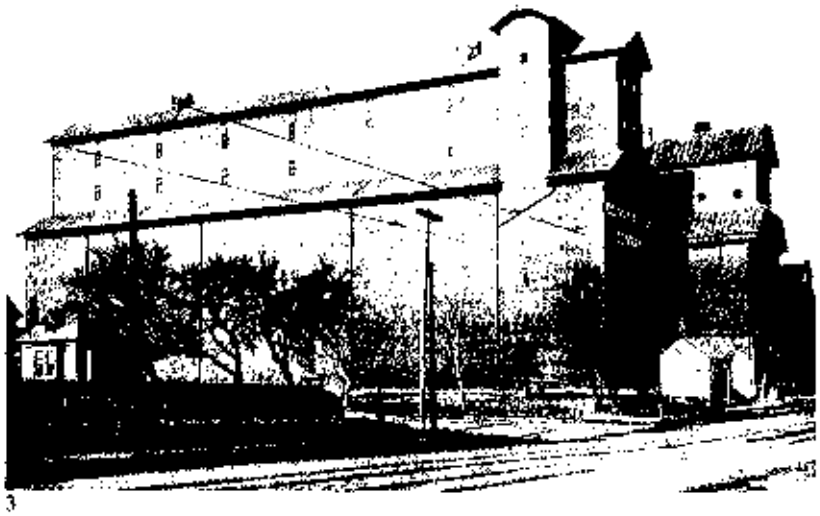
This complex of buildings started as the Woodman Linseed Oil Works in 1872, which grew to be the largest in the U.S. By 1890 the company had expanded to Woodman and Ritchie, with the adjacent grain elevator built for storage of their products.

(Nebraska State Historical Society)

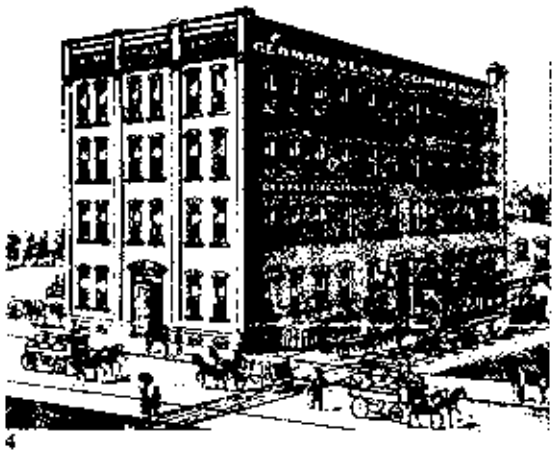
4. German Yeast Factory, 28th and Belt Line Railroad, built 1884

The Yeast Factory was among the firms that constructed new buildings along the Belt Line Railroad in North Omaha. The company produced 100,000 boxes of standard German dry hop yeast annually.

(Ed Sterba Collection)



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Industrial Development in North Omaha

Although the bulk of North Omaha was residential in character, the district was adjacent to industry on the east and north sides. Some preliminary manufacturing development began in the southeast section of the area in the 1870's, but most expansion occurred through the boom years of the following decade. The Belt Line Railroad, completed by the Missouri Pacific in 1886, had tracks extending north from the 15th and Webster Street Station, running below the 16th Street bluff line to Boyd Street, then along Boyd Street to 31st Avenue, and then meandering southwest through the city. The Belt Line stimulated the development of industry on North Omaha's edges, and created impetus for residential growth by providing jobs for residents.

In the 1870's the few businesses in North Omaha reflected its rural character. By far, the most prevalent enterprises were market gardeners and florists, who took advantage of the available open land to raise fruits, vegetables and flowers for sale at the open market in Omaha. A few firms, particularly those in the building trades, also required large open tracts of land and located in the district. Among the earliest industries was the Phoenix Foundry and Machine Company, located at 25th and Patrick Streets until 1889. After a fire destroyed the plant, the company, which employed 25 men, moved out to the Belt Line and Pinkney Street.[1]

Omaha became known as a brickmaking center in the 1880's, with 52 brick companies turning out 150 million bricks annually. Among the principal manufacturers was Martin Ittner, who operated two brick yards, one of which was located at 30th and Lake Streets. Two other large firms, the Northwestern Marble Works at 1224 North 18th Street, and the well-known Woodman Linseed Oil Works at 1012 North 17th Street, established the rather industrial character of the southeast portion of the district by 1880.[2]

Breweries provided one continuous manufacturing presence in North Omaha, beginning with those operated by Ephraim Engler at 18th and Nicholas and Joseph Baumann at 18th and Charles. Engler began brewing in 1868 and moved to his North 18th Street location by 1871. Baumann began his business in 1865 and later hired Gottlieb Storz, a German immigrant, as his foreman. Storz eventually took control of the company and in 1893 erected a $500,000 brewery at 16th and Grace that soon became a North Omaha landmark.[3] The building, distinguished by its brick smokestack with "Storz" imbedded in it in contrasting brick, housed the Storz Brewery until it finally closed in the 1960's. In keeping with the fashion of breweries in those days, the Storz Company had a number of saloons throughout the city that sold only Storz beer. Gottlieb Storz's brother Charles operated several of them in North Omaha and also resided nearby in Kountze Place.

foreign born. Ten years later, the foreign born numbered 6,300 of 16,000 Omahans, and in 1880 they made up one-third of the city's population. Scandinavians, Germans and Irish accounted for about 70 percent of the foreign born total in 1880 and again in 1890, an understandable figure in view of the fact that these countries, along with Great Britain, provided 85 percent of all immigrants to the U.S. before 1880.[22]

These immigrants spread throughout America, settling in both cities and rural areas, with Scandinavians and Germans especially populating the farms of the growing North Central states in the late nineteenth century. These groups were assimilated rather easily into American life after learning to speak English. In Omaha, they rarely clustered into identifiable neighborhoods, but were found throughout the city. Even in 1880, when one-third of Omaha's population was foreign born, there was no neighborhood made up entirely of one particular nationality. While a group of Germans or Irish may have lived in a neighborhood, they also shared it with clusters of Danes or Swedes.[23]

Although North Omaha attracted several ethnic groups from the 1880's on, it has never been identified as an ethnically diverse area like South Omaha. Each portion of the city attracted different groups initially because of the kinds of job opportunities it offered. North Omaha's early industrial growth enticed the first arriving Scandinavians, Germans and Irish. Because the Northern and Western Europeans usually had job skills, it was easier for them to assimilate and move throughout the city. Thus North Omaha had few easily identified ethnic neighborhoods. South Omaha and its packing plants developed in the 1880's and also attracted the Northern and



1. Missouri Pacific Railroad Yard, View South Toward the Industrial Tract, 1928
The rail yards and adjoining industries below the 16th Street bluff line provided not only a solid eastern boundary to North Omaha, but jobs for its residents throughout the past century. (Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)
2. Ford Motor Company Plant, 16th and Cuming Streets, 1954

Western Europeans initially, but later became identified as a place of employment for the unskilled immigrants who arrived from Southern and Eastern Europe after 1900. These immigrants, Poles, Czechs, Lithuanians and others, tended to cluster in neighborhoods. Many of the South Omahans were Roman Catholic, and their parish churches, organized by nationality, helped to cement their neighborhoods together. Except for two Catholic churches and later synagogues, North Omaha was primarily Protestant, with congregations that exhibited little of the permanence of their South Omaha counterparts.[24]

There was also greater prejudice against the Eastern and Southern Europeans by old-stock Americans, who were wary of the newcomers because they had different cultural backgrounds than the Anglo-Saxon heritage of the Northern and Western Europeans. Varying religions, job skills and prejudice helped create the solid ethnic neighborhoods of South Omaha and the lack of them in North Omaha.[25]

The Northern and Western Europeans

Among the first immigrant groups in the city were the Irish, who were active in politics and in building up the city. Construction of the Union Pacific initially attracted Irish laborers and many stayed to work for the railroad later on. When they settled in the area west and northwest of the Union Pacific shops, Holy Family Church at 18th and Izard Streets was built to serve them. Holy Family parish had its beginnings in 1876, when a frame schoolhouse was moved to 17th and Cuming for use as a church and boys' school. Although St. Philomena's Church downtown at 9th and Harney also served Irish Catholics, it was considered too far away for attendance by the well-to-do families who resided near

Like the Storz Brewery, grain milling and storage relied on the agricultural products of Omaha's hinterland which arrived by rail. The concrete towers of grain elevators soon became characteristic of North 16th Street. Since 1887, when the Omaha Milling Company erected its first mill at 1521 North 16th, North Omaha has been a location for milling wheat into flour. The Omaha Milling Company was owned by grain merchant Nels Updike until 1922, when he sold it to Nebraska Consolidated Mills, the forerunner of ConAgra. Long-time Omaha grain merchant Nathan Merriam and James W. Holmquist, whose family operated elevators in small towns throughout northeast Nebraska, built elevators at 15th and Manderson and at 17th and Nicholas Street. In 1927 they sold the 15th and Manderson elevator to the Missouri Pacific Railroad, which leased it to other companies for grain storage.[4]

Large manufacturing firms required the availability of rail lines in order to effectively haul their products. Two millwork companies, Disbrow and Company and Adams-Kelly Millworks, were early settlers near 12th and Nicholas. Organized in 1886 and 1892, respectively, the firms manufactured wooden door and window frames and interior millwork. Another well-known millwork firm was the Alfred Bloom Company. Bloom, a Swedish immigrant, had begun his business at 19th and Charles in the 1890's, then later operated a mill at 24th and Grant. By 1901 he had built a huge four-story brick plant at 15th and California, an industrial area that continued to grow into the twentieth century.[5]

Other construction material firms requiring not only rail lines but a significant amount of space, were lumber yards. Several in North Omaha were the Wyatt-Bullard Lumber Company at 20th and Izard; the Star-Union Company at 10th and Nicholas; the yards of C. N. Dietz at 13th and California; and those of F.C. Colpetzer and C.H. Guiou at 18th and Nicholas. Two firms dealing with petroleum in the 1890's, the Consolidated Tank Line Company at 13th and Locust and the Scofield, Shurmer and Teagle Refinery at 10th and Clark Streets, foreshadowed the later use of the industrial tract as a center for petroleum storage tanks.[6]

The industrial sector below the 16th Street bluff line continued to expand throughout the nineteenth century. The Nicholas and Locust Street viaducts provided corridors for employees living in North Omaha, allowing them to walk to work nearby. The industrial area expanded even farther eastward with the establishment of East Omaha as an industrial suburb in 1887. With firms such as the Carter White Lead Works, which employed about 75 men, and the Omaha Box Factory with its 65 employees, East Omaha provided another outlet for the workers of North Omaha.[7]

The industrial tract along the north edge of the Belt Line attracted new enterprises soon after the railroad's completion. The German Yeast Factory erected a three-story brick manufacturing plant in 1886 at the intersection of North 28th Street and the Belt Line. Murphy, Wasey and Company, furniture manufacturers, built a $15,000 brick factory at Spaulding Street in 1888. Two more firms stood at North 29th Street and the Belt Line by the early 1890's: Miller and Gunderson, manufacturers of sash, doors and blinds, begun in 1888; and the Omaha Casket Company, established in 1887.[8]

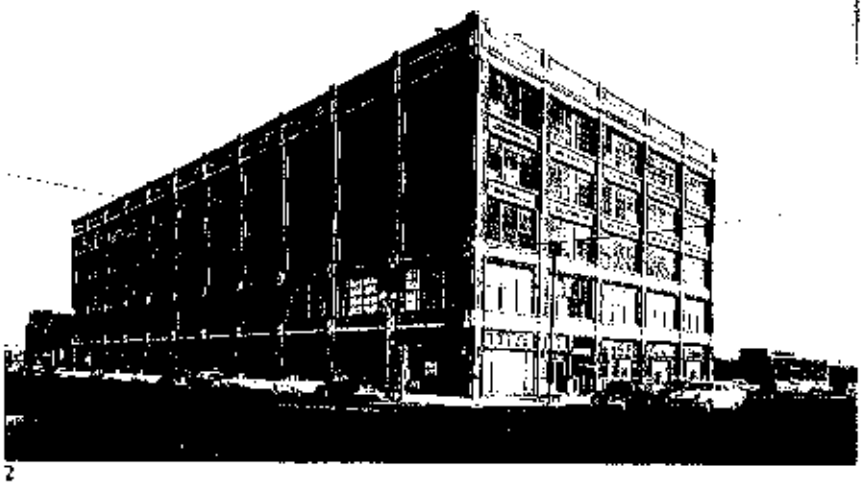
By the turn of the century the southern edge of North Omaha had also begun to attract industry. The Wyatt-Bullard Lumber Company at 20th and Izard had become Bullard and Hoagland Lumber, while the C.W. Hull Coal Company stood across the street from it. The new, modern Continental Baking Company was built at 20th and Cuming in 1912.[9] Certainly it was logical that North Omaha, with a skyline marked by grain elevators, would also contain a bakery or two for turning the milled flour into bread.

Another manufacturing plant that heralded a new era in urban development was the Ford Motor Company Plant at 16th and Cuming. Designed by the great Detroit industrial architect Albert Kahn, the plant produced parts for Ford engines. The Ford Company and the automobiles it produced perhaps played a greater role in changing the way Americans lived than almost any other invention of that generation, making it easier for people to move farther out of downtown neighborhoods like North Omaha. As petroleum and gasoline became necessary not only for automobiles but for various

Designed by the well known industrial architect Albert Kahn, the Ford building represented the new architecture of the twentieth century.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)

3. Holy Family Church, 18th and Izard Streets, built 1883

Holy Family Church served successive groups of Irish and Italian immigrants who lived in the surrounding industrial neighborhood. It is the oldest church building still utilized as a house of worship in the city.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)



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industries, one of Omaha's centers for storage tanks and petroleum company facilities developed adjacent to the Belt Line. By the 1920's, North 11th Street, which was reached by the Nicholas ad Locust Street viaducts, contained offices and storage tanks for at least six oil companies. That industrial park also contained a variety of heavy industries, including an ironworks, two steel products companies and a boiler factory and a lumber yard.[10]

Just as the industrial area east of 16th Street gradually took on new functions, so did the Belt Line industrial sector on the north edge of the district. One of the earliest twentieth century additions was the Uncle Sam Breakfast Food factory at 28th Avenue and Sahler, built in 1907. The founder, Lafayette Coltrin, resembled the fictional Uncle Sam for whom the cereal was named. Thereafter, the various firms that comprised the Belt Line neighborhood remained somewhat constant over several decades. Among the companies that persisted were Platner Brothers Lumber, Hopper Brothers Coal and Lumber, Walrath-Sherwood Lumber, Omaha Blaugas (later Economy Oil Company), U.S. Brush Company, and Omaha Concrete Stone Company.[11]

This area also experienced some new construction by the 1930's and 1940's. Two cracker and cookie manufacturing companies located in the vicinity: the Independent Biscuit Company and the Iten-Barmettler Biscuit Company. Independent Biscuit was located at 4310 North 30th Street in the Builders' and Merchandisers' Mart in 1936. The new Iten-Barmettler building was constructed in 1936 at 4301 North 30th. Designed by architect James T. Allan, the factory was built by Otto H. Barmettler to house his newly formed cracker manufacturing concern. Barmettler had come to Omaha in 1908 to work for the Iten Biscuit Company, of which he eventually became general manager. When the Iten Company became an affiliate of the National Biscuit Company (Nabisco), Barmettler continued to work for them until deciding to form his own company with the widow of his former employer.[12]

One last addition to the Belt Line industrial park was the streamlined Moderne style factory erected by the American Road Equipment Company at 4302 North 28th Street in 1948. Designed by staff engineer Frank Vigneri, the building was constructed of poured monolithic concrete, reinforced with surplus World War II airplane landing mat. American Road Equipment pioneered in the manufacturing of motorized road graders and later built forklift trucks.[13]

Although industrial expansion continued in North Omaha after the bulk of residential construction was completed, it declined by the 1950's. Most available land was taken by then, and industries increasingly dependent on trucks rather than railroads for hauling began to move to the southwest fringe of the city where new industrial parks were located. Yet many of the various manufacturing plants that helped provide impetus for the development of North Omaha remained, continuing the presence of industry in that section of the city throughout the twentieth century.

Creighton University and the North Side railroad workers. The school was eventually replaced in 1883 by a two-story brick church at 18th and Izard. The new $17,000 church contained numerous gifts from the wealthy Creighton family, including the main and side altars, confessionals, pews and church bells.[26]

Census data from 1880 showed a concentration of Irish population residing along 16th and 17th Streets north of Izard. Many resided in the cottages built on the small lots of the Omaha Building and Savings Association Addition west of 17th and in similar dwellings on 16th Street. These structures were typical one-story cottages with an attic and an open front porch. Although inexpensive, the cottages contained individual builder touches, such as a side bay window and often some type of decorative porch detailing. This location also held a few rear lot dwellings, rather rare in Omaha, as early as the 1880's. The rear lot houses, often referred to as mother-in-law's cottages, were a means to utilize all available lot space for housing. In North Omaha they were located primarily on the alley between North 16th and 17th Streets.[27]

The Irish presence in North Omaha was reflected by their business places in the 1880's and 1890's. Among the businessmen were T. F. McNamara, who operated a meat market at 1703 Cuming; G. P. Muldoon, blacksmith at 1614 Cuming; Patrick McArdle, coal, at 18th and Izard; and the saloons of James and Edward Quinn at 1024 and 1102 North 16th Streets. Irish residents also lived in the area northwest of 24th and Cuming by 1890. Among the Irish Union Pacific Railroad workers living there were Michael McCandles of 2924 Indiana; Patrick Flanagan at 2424 Seward; Maurice J. Scannell at 2822 Franklin; and Michael



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1. Worker's Cottages, 1400 block, North 16th Street, 1984

Worker's cottages were utilitarian in design and filled up most of the narrow lots on which they were built. Occasionally, mothers-in-law cottages, as shown here, were built in the rear yard to utilize all available space

(Omaha City Planning Department)

2. German Day Parade, 16th and Cuming Streets

While Germans generally assimilated into American society, they perpetuated their cultural heritage through various ethnic organizations and celebrations.

(Douglas County Historical Society)

3. Storz Brewing Company, 16th and Clark Streets

Gottlieb Storz, a German immigrant, started

McGrievy at 2637 Blondo.[28]

As the Irish presence was becoming established with Holy Family Church, the growth of the 1880's caused the Archdiocese to establish another parish farther north. The new Sacred Heart Church was completed in 1890 on North 26th Street between Sprague and Sahler. When the economic boom collapsed and that area failed to gain as many residents as expected, the pastor found a new location at 22nd and Binney in Kountze Place. The new site was donated by Herman Kountze with the provision that the new structure be built of stone or brick exterior, cost at least $8,000 and be constructed within five years. The location was more centrally placed within the parish, which extended from the river to 30th Street and Grace Street north. The new Gothic Revival Sacred Heart Church, designed by architects Fisher and Lawrie, was dedicated in 1902; an elementary and high school were built soon after.[29]

Germans made up the largest group of foreign born in Omaha in both 1880 and 1890. While a good portion of some 4,000 Germans in 1880 settled south of Dodge Street, many also settled in North Omaha, particularly along Cuming Street. Like the Irish, the Germans were best identified by their businesses and their churches. Among the most well known of German businessmen was Gottlieb Storz, whose brewery and smokestack on North 16th were familiar landmarks. Gottlieb's brother, Charles, operated saloons in various locations on North 24th and North 16th Streets at the turn of the century. Among other German businessmen were Joseph Schmidt, druggist at 2402 Cuming; Bruening Brothers Meat Market at 2706 Cuming; H. Eichorn & Company grocery at 2704 Lake; and Alfred Wolff's saloon at 2201 Cuming.[30]

Another long-time German presence was the Ederer family, which established its florist business near 30th and Bristol by 1890. On land that had been the Jensen truck garden farm, Charles and John Ederer built greenhouses, a florist's shop and a 15-room brick residence. Charles Ederer, once a park designer in Germany, later worked on landscaping plans for the 1898 Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition. North 30th Street also attracted the Flurry family, relatives of the Ederers. In 1892, they constructed the Flurry Block at 3421 North 30th Street, a two-story, $8,000 brick structure designed by Joseph Guth. The Flurrys had previously operated a cigarmaking

as a foreman at Omaha's Baumann Brewery and eventually established his own brewery on North 16th Street.
(Omaha Public Library)

4. Pella Lutheran Church (Hope Lutheran) 2723 North 30th Street, 1984

Built for a congregation of Danish heritage, this church was later sold to a black congregation and became Hope Lutheran.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

5. Evangelical Covenant (Swedish Mission) Hospital, 24th and Pratt Streets

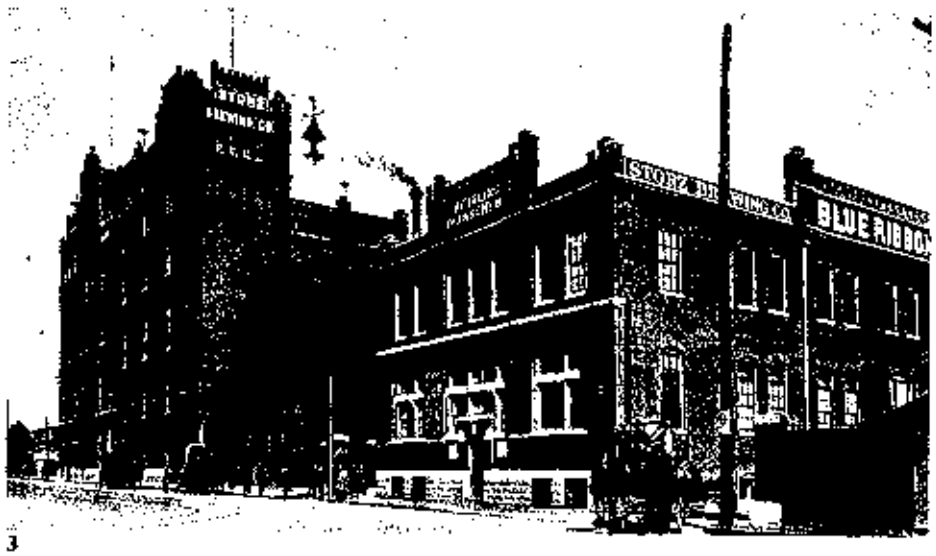
It was not unusual for ethnic groups to develop their own institutions in America. In 1905, Omaha Swedes established the Swedish Mission Hospital, and built this three-story structure soon after. The site is now occupied by a social service agency building.
(Nebraska State Historical Society)

business out of their nearby home on Pinkney Street. The new building held the business on the main floor while the family lived upstairs.[31]

Most Germans in North Omaha were Protestants. Some German Catholics attended Holy Family Church, but the Germans were more evident through their Evangelical, Baptist and Lutheran churches. At least two Evangelical churches were built in North Omaha: Zion's Church of the Evangelical Association, organized 1888, which built a structure at 25th and Caldwell, and Salem Church of the Evangelical Association, which constructed its building at the southwest corner of 18th and Cuming in 1904. The German Immanuel Baptist Church constructed a building at 26th and Seward in 1888 and later moved to 24th and Miami. Several blocks away was the Church of the Brethren (Dunkard Society), which erected a house of worship at 2123 Miami in 1915. Among the more long lasting of German churches were St. Paul's German-English Lutheran and First German Presbyterian. St. Paul's was established in 1887 at 28th and Parker. Although destroyed by the 1913 tornado, the church was rebuilt at 25th and Evans. The First German Presbyterian Church constructed its house of worship at the southeast corner of 18th and Cuming in 1882. By 1910 they had built another church at 20th and Willis; it became known as Bethany Church and remained there for several decades.[32]

The Scandinavians, principally Swedes and Danes, made up a third large ethnic group in 1880. Swedes in particular located in the area north and west of the Union Pacific Railroad shops, on the fringe of the Irish settlement, and farther north, between 18th and 20th, Paul to Seward. Both Swedes and Danes settled farther west along either side of Cuming Street as well.[33]

Although neither Swedes nor Danes clustered for very long in any area, there was a brief Swedish settlement known as Stockholm around 19th and Charles. This location was convenient to Immanuel Lutheran Church at 19th and Cass, then the main congregation in the city. Among the Swedish residents there in the late 1880's were Reverend Eric A. Fogelstrom, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran at 1127 North 19th; attorney Arthur Ferguson at 1586 North 18th Street; and grocer John P. Jerpe at 1525 North 19th Street. The houses just south of Jerpe's home formed a real



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1. J.F. Bloom Company, 1702 Cuming Street, 1984
A Swedish immigrant, J.F. Bloom established his cemetery monument business in Omaha in 1900. The facade of Bloom's headquarters, built in 1910, illustrates the use of impressive stone detailing to enliven a vernacular commercial structure.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

2. Ideal Cement Stone Company, 1708-12 Cuming Street, 1950
Another building trade company formed by Scandinavian immigrants, the Ideal Cement Stone Company erected several Classic Box style homes from concrete blocks in North Omaha.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)



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cluster of Swedish settlement and were inhabited by four Union Pacific Railroad employees: Magnus Larson, laborer; Nels Larson, carpenter; August Wickstrom, machinist; and Emanuel Wickstrom, blacksmith.[32]

Scandinavians also made their mark in commercial and industrial life in North Omaha, particularly in the building trades. J. F. Bloom came to America from Sweden in 1873 and learned the trade of stone cutting and monument making. He located his business in Omaha in 1900 and in 1910 established his headquarters at 17th and Cuming in an imposing marble-columned building. The company continued to grow and in 1927 built a complete manufacturing plant at 20th and Ames. Alfred Bloom, (no relation to J.F.), founder and president of the Alfred Bloom Millworks Company, arrived in America in 1885. He established his own shop at 19th and Charles in 1893, then purchased a mill at 24th and Grant by 1896. Within five years the business had expanded enough for him to build a new four-story brick factory at 15th and California Streets. Two manufacturing firms were located along the Belt Line in the northwest corner of the neighborhood. T. G. Northwall, Frank Wipperman and V. A. Johnson established the Omaha Concrete Stone Company on North 28th Avenue in 1902. The Ideal Cement Stone Company, organized in 1906 by Nels J. Peterson, was eventually located at 31st and Spaulding. Both firms manufactured concrete blocks and sold builder supplies such as bricks, cement and sand.[33]

Perhaps the most widely known product of the North Omaha Swedes was the company founded by John P. Jerpe. He operated a grocery at 19th and Charles until 1898 and then established Jerpe Cold Storage and Commission Company, concentrating on dairy products and meat. When Jerpe retired in 1929, his vice-president, Carl A. Swanson, took over the company and eventually developed it into a frozen-food empire bearing the Swanson name.[34]

Among the businesses established by Danes in North Omaha was the P. F. Petersen Bakery at 24th and Cuming. Established in 1890, the bakery was later consolidated with three others to form the Union Pacific Steam Baking Company at 3610 North 30th Street. In later years the firm was again known as Petersen Baking Company and grew famous for its Peter Pan bread.[35]

The Scandinavians founded a variety of churches in North Omaha, none of which remained there very long. Three were eventually located in Shinn's Addition west of 24th Street: First Danish Baptist, at 2511 Decatur in 1888; the Norwegian-Danish Methodist, at 25th and Decatur after the turn of the century; and the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran, which stood at the corner of 26th and Hamilton. St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran was organized in 1886 and built a church at 21st and Burdette in 1887. Twenty years later the congregation constructed a new building at 20th and Burdette, the church's home for another four decades. Pella Lutheran Church, a Danish congregation, was organized in 1886. The congregation first met in a mission house at 25th and Decatur, which was moved to 26th and Grant and later replaced by a new building in 1894. When that church was destroyed by the 1913 tornado, the members erected another new building at 30th and Corby, where they remained for three decades.[36]

The 1890's Depression

While the 1880's expanded the city's boundaries and increased its population to three times the 1880 figure, the boom could not last forever. By the end of the decade, the inflated prices charged for lots and homes had begun to drop. As the economy slowed, the construction industry went into a slump and the feverish pace of building came to an end. The usual signs of depression, such as bank failures, soup kitchens, charity stores and unemployment lines, made their appearance in cities across the United States, including Omaha. Streetcar tracks running to new subdivisions rusted from disuse, while many of the suburbs became cornfields for lack of new construction.

In addition Omaha suffered from the drought that struck the Midwest. As the wholesaling and retailing center for the region, the city's economy was necessarily tied to that of its hinterland. The hot, dry winds and lack of rain ended the hopes of

3. Ak-Sar-Ben Fire, June 1927
Until the 1927 fire, the Old Coliseum at 20th and Burdette provided a home for the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben and their den shows. The site remained a playground until 1963, when the Gene Eppley Boys Club was built on it.
(Douglas County Historical Society)

4. 2552 Spaulding Street, 1984
Smaller, vernacular versions of high style Queen Anne houses were built in the 1890's for middle class homeowners.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

many farmers who had settled their lands in the wet years of the 1880's, and many farms were abandoned. The desperation of the farmers' plight was made more clear to Omahans in July of 1892 when the People's Party, or Populists, decided to hold their national convention in the city. The Populists had grown out of the old Farmer's Alliance of the previous decade, a loosely organized group which supported regulation of transportation and communication facilities, currency reform and equitable prices for farm products. As the depression worsened, increasing numbers of farmers flocked to the party and attended the July convention.[39]

The Populists convened their Omaha gathering at the Coliseum, a huge auditorium erected at 20th and Burdette in 1887. Known as the "Madison Square Garden of the Midwest," the Coliseum had been the site of such spectacular events as six-day bicycle races and tugs of war until the political convention, which brought some 1,300 Populist delegates and 10,000 visitors to the four-day meeting.[40] The Omaha convention was a significant factor in coalescing the Populists' beliefs and attracting attention to their cause. Some of the ideas they supported were later adopted by the two major national parties, and a number of their proposals became law in the Progressive Era after 1900.

The Coliseum on North 20th Street went on to have an even more colorful life. The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, a civic and social organization created in 1895 as a means to bring entertainment to depression-weary Omahans, made the Coliseum its home until the structure burned in 1927. For years the Knights put on "den shows," humorous plays designed to attract out-of-town businessmen to Omaha and its commercial advantages. Their annual fall festival and its spectacular electric parades began at the Coliseum and proceeded south on 20th Street to downtown.[41]

While the Populists made the farmers' plight painfully clear to the nation, they could not end the drought and depression. The economic situation was the most severe Omaha had ever faced, but it did not completely curtail all development. The first half of the decade saw some construction in the southern portion of North Omaha, particularly Shinn's and Parker's Additions, which had grown in the previous decade. The land between Blondo and Lake Streets west of 24th, relatively unsettled in the 1880's, also experienced some building. New residences also went up along Bristol and Spaulding Streets, two streets that were paved by 1890 and served as important connectors between 24th and 30th north of Lake. One other area of construction occurred in the irregularly shaped subdivisions between Burdette and Locust, east of 24th, which started to develop by the 1890's.[42]

The bulk of residences erected were one-and-a-half to two-story frame vernacular houses. Individual touches, such as Eastlake detailing on porches or the use of fish-scale shingles in gable ends, were often added by builders. Structures on Bristol and Spaulding included the same vernacular types exhibited farther south but also contained a sprinkling of larger and more detailed dwellings. Both cottages and larger dwellings often displayed elements borrowed from the high style Queen Annes, such as corner towers, wrap-around porches or bay windows. The bulk of this construction, however, was aimed at the middle or working classes as opposed to the elaborate high style housing in Kountze Place. That area's rapid 1880's growth slowed almost to a standstill in the next decade. Clearly the more expensive architect designed homes were not being built in North Omaha during the depression. The lower cost housing south of Kountze Place, meeting the needs of lower and middle income families, made up the bulk of construction in the 1890's.[43]

While the depression ended the frantic days of the first wave of construction in North Omaha, it was, in reality, only a brief pause in the buildup of the neighborhood. The twentieth century would bring not only new construction, but new groups of people into the neighborhood, both of which would further affect the appearance of the landscape.



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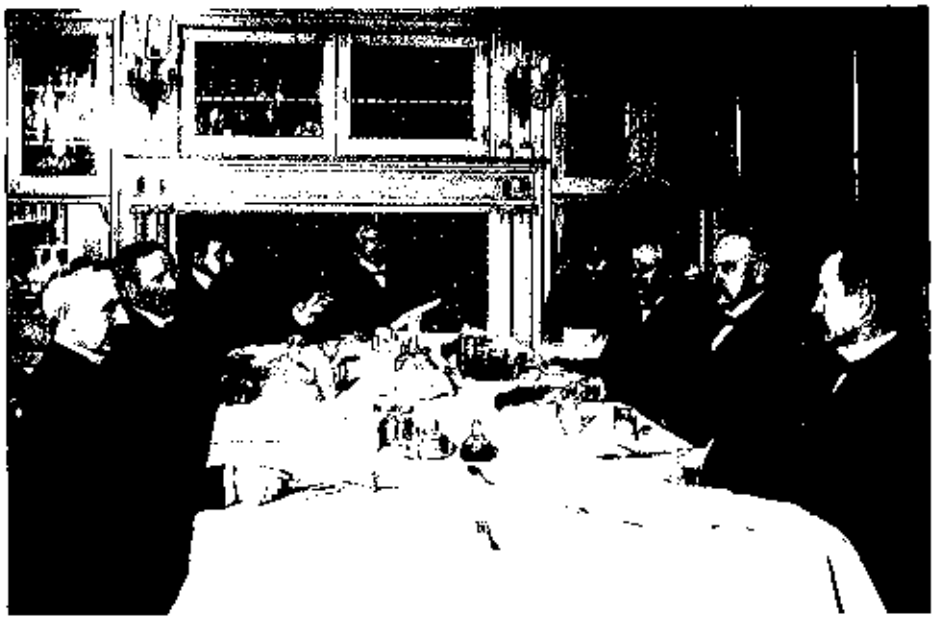
Prosperity and Growth, 1898-1920

Recovery and the Exposition

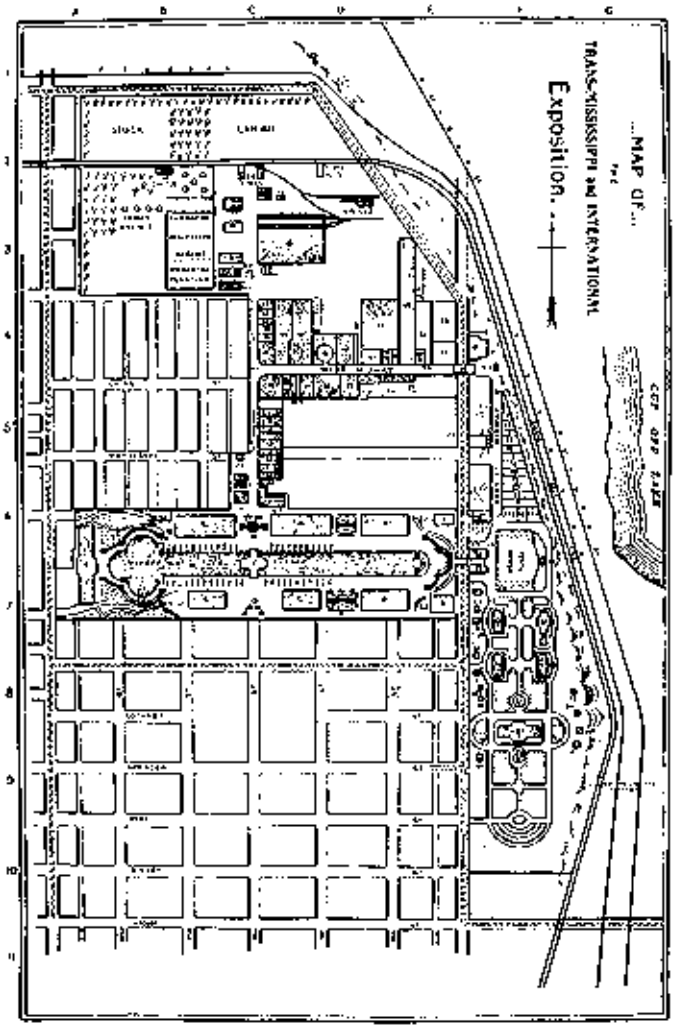
Despite the depression which continued until 1898, Omaha's municipal government initiated a long-term public works project — the development of a park and boulevard system. The creation of parks systems was one aspect of the City Beautiful Movement, a late nineteenth-early twentieth century effort to improve the physical appearance of the nation's developing urban centers. The idea of beautification was enhanced by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago with its classical style architecture and orderly, planned atmosphere. At the same time, park land was being viewed as an important amenity of urban life, and cities such as Boston, New York, Kansas City and St. Louis all began to develop park and boulevard systems.

The creation of the Omaha Board of Park Commissioners in 1889 started the city's effort to implement new urban design principles. The growth of the 1880's convinced Omahans that their city was a new metropolitan center and needed the beautification effort to further establish its identity. Among the Board's first actions was the hiring of landscape architect H.W.S. Cleveland of Minneapolis to design the system and provide landscaping plans for parks within it. Cleveland had previously worked for Frederick Law Olmsted, the designer of New York City's Central Park, and had designed boulevard systems in Chicago and Minneapolis before his Omaha work. The Omaha system began with Riverview Park in southeast Omaha and encircled the whole city, including both existing and planned parks. The first leg of the system to be graded and landscaped was Florence Boulevard, running through the heart of North Omaha. It followed North 19th to Ohio Street and then jogged over to 20th, continuing north to the planned Miller Park. Grading of the boulevard began in 1893, along with planting of trees and shrubs to beautify the roadway, which soon became popular for biking and driving because of its level terrain.[1]

The presence of Florence Boulevard influenced the choice of location for one of Omaha's most important events — the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898. Several sites around the city were considered for the Exposition, but when Herman Kountze offered to donate four blocks at the north end of Kountze



1. Executive Committee of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition, 1898
Seated, left to right: Freeman P. Kirkendall, buildings and grounds; Edward E. Bruce, exhibits; Abraham L. Reed, concessions and privileges; Zachery T. Lindsey, ways and means; John A. Wakefield, secretary; Edward Rosewater, publicity and promotion; William N. Babcock, transportation; Gurdon W. Wattles, president.
(Omaha Public Library)



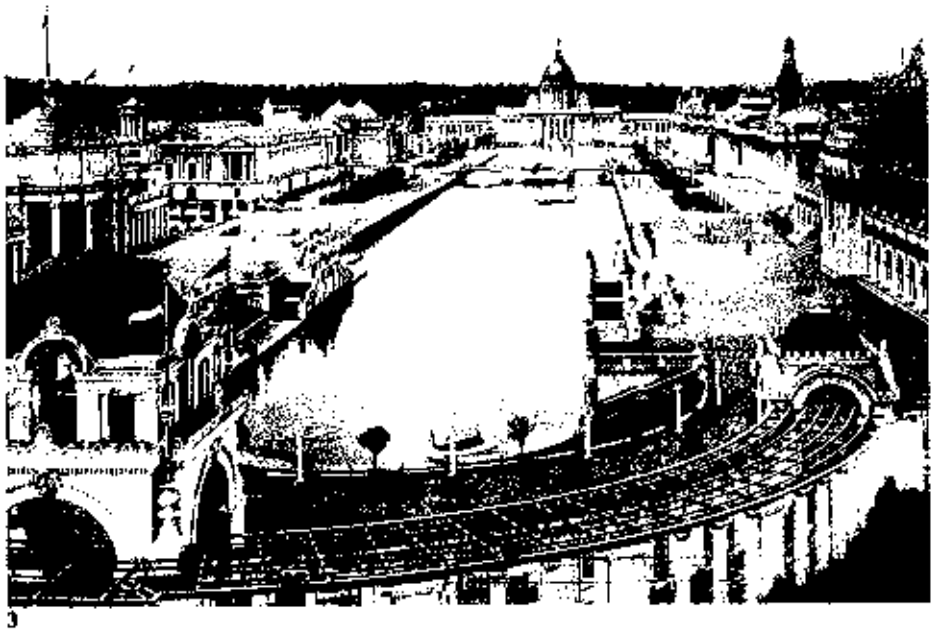
2. Map of Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Site, 1898
The Grand Court of the Exposition lay between 16th and 24th, Pinkney to Pratt. The Midway was located on the bluff east of 16th Street, while various agricultural exhibits extended north to Ames Avenue.
(Omaha Public Library)

3. View West Toward the Government Building, Grand Court of the Exposition, 1898

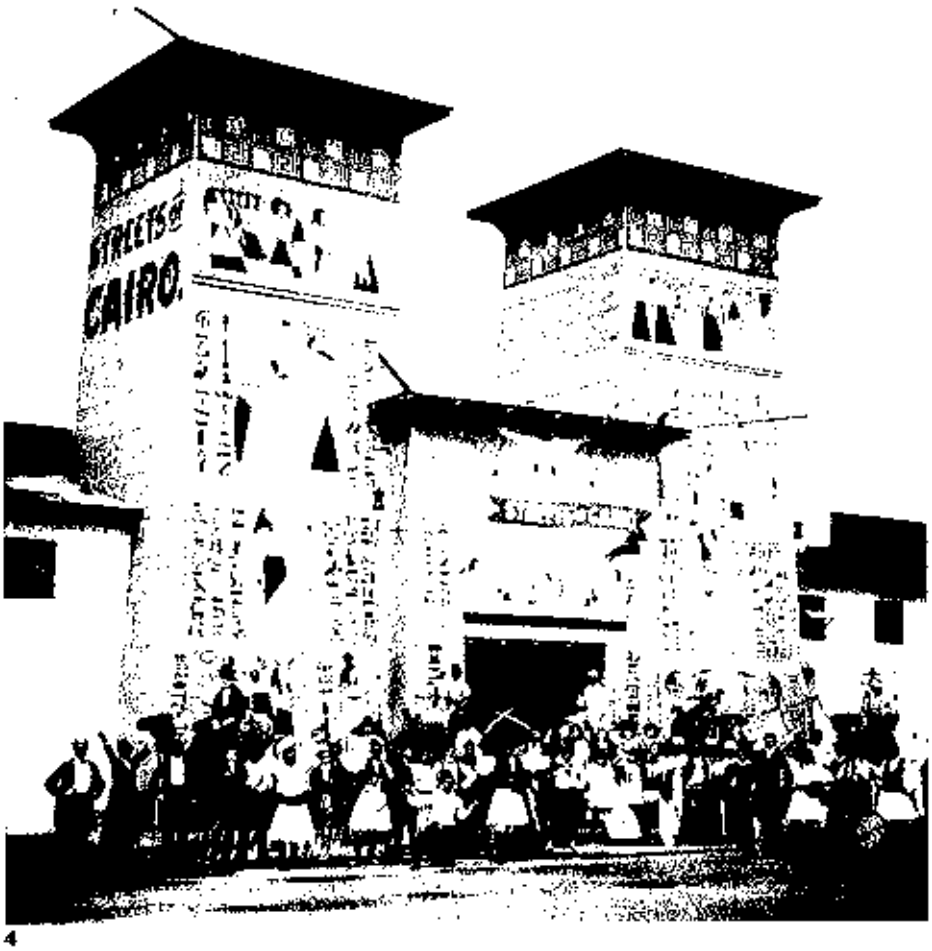
Although they looked permanent, the classical and Renaissance-style Exposition buildings were actually constructed of plaster of paris and horsehair. After the fair ended, the buildings were dismantled and some of the remains pushed into the lagoon.
(Omaha Public Library)

4. The Streets of Cairo, Exposition Midway, 1898

The highlight of the Midway for many fairgoers was the Streets of Cairo, home of Little Egypt, the dancer who attracted crowds with her famous "muscle dance."
(Omaha Public Library)



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Place for the Exposition and use as a park afterward, the decision was made. No doubt Kountze realized that the Exposition would help build up North Omaha, including his Kountze Place subdivision, by encouraging other construction as well as street paving and extension of streetcar lines.[2]

In the long run the Exposition did lead to new construction in North Omaha, but more importantly it put Omaha on the road to economic recovery. Based on the success of the World's Columbian Exposition, the Trans-Mississippi Exposition was originally conceived by local businessmen as a way to showcase the products, industry and civilization of the states west of the Mississippi River. The great spectacle was run by Omaha banker Gurdon W. Wattles with financing from government sources and private citizens. The fair brought over 2.6 million visitors to the city in its five-month term and was both a financial and psychological success in lifting the gloom of depression from Omahans.[3]

Perhaps the reason for this overwhelming achievement was that the fair bore absolutely no resemblance to life in the Trans-Mississippi West. Classical and Renaissance style buildings stood around the reflecting lagoon, forming the Grand Court of the Exposition. Under the guidance of Omaha architects Thomas Kimball and C. Howard Walker, the glittering white city presented a look of order and decorum. Other Exposition buildings extended north beyond the Grand Court toward Ames Avenue, while the midway, the section of the fair to arouse the interest of the majority of fairgoers, was located east of Sherman Avenue in a section known as the Bluff Tract. The midway and its attractions often caught the attention of the newspapers as they discussed the giant see-saw ride, the depiction of a Spanish-American War battle, or Little Egypt, the dancer who brought in the crowds with her revealing "hootchy-kootchy" routines.[4]

With numerous buildings housing state exhibits and others devoted to liberal arts, transportation, agriculture and government, the Exposition was a celebration of how far life on the Great Plains had come in half a century. In Omaha the great fair signaled the beginning of the city's golden age of development. This era, lasting from the turn of the century until World War I, brought growth, expansion and prosperity, all of which were clearly in evidence in

1. B. Kutler, The Tailor
Kutler's Tailor Shop was typical of the small shops that lined the North 24th Street business district.
(Nebraska Jewish Historical Society)
2. Interior of Neighborhood Grocery Store, 27th and Lake Streets
(Nebraska Jewish Historical Society)

North Omaha.

Twentieth Century Growth and Residential Construction

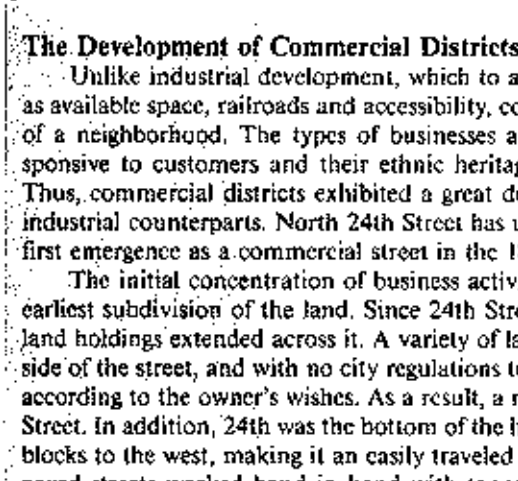
As the Exposition signaled a general economic recovery in Omaha, it also attracted attention to North Omaha and initiated its greatest decade of new construction. Between 1900 and 1910, all portions of the district experienced a significant level of building. For the first time new construction occurred in all areas, both north and south of Lake Street, as residents began moving farther out from downtown.[5]

Although only 29 new subdivisions were platted between 1900 and 1914, relatively few in comparison to the 44 laid out in 1886-1887, the decade still witnessed an amazing level of construction in both new subdivisions and those laid out previously. New housing continued to go up south of Lake Street. Patrick's Addition, north of Blondo to Lake west of 24th, experienced heavy construction during the decade. The fringes of this area also began to develop, particularly toward 30th Street. In this sector, only one large area northwest of 29th and Parker remained undeveloped because of its prohibitive terrain, which reached a high point at 29th and Blondo.[6]

New construction continued in the southeast quadrant, too. The Horbach land at 20th and Paul, which still did not have streets cut through it, experienced some building but continued to provide enough open space to serve as a circus ground after the turn of the century. At the same time, this sector was old enough to begin a second wave of construction. Land uses that had persisted since the 1870's were changing, with industrial uses replacing some residential areas. Housing types began to change too, particularly along 16th Street, which experienced a transformation from a nineteenth century country drive lined with estates to a heavily traveled artery convenient to downtown. Multi-family housing in the form of apartment houses became a predominant new land use, as old mansions were torn down or subdivided for apartment or institutional use.[7]

Certainly North 16th Street was ripe for this particular type of land use change. When the first mansions were built in the 1870's, the road had been a fine overlook to the river plain below. In 1877, however, the Missouri changed its course, forming Cut-Off Lake (Carter Lake) and a new channel several miles away. The flat plain already held railroad tracks and throughout





The Development of Commercial Districts to 1920

Unlike industrial development, which to a large extent relied on amenities such as available space, railroads and accessibility, commercial areas reflected the residents of a neighborhood. The types of businesses and their locations were primarily responsive to customers and their ethnic heritage, buying habits, and income levels. Thus, commercial districts exhibited a great deal more change over time than their industrial counterparts. North 24th Street has undergone numerous changes since its first emergence as a commercial street in the 1880's.

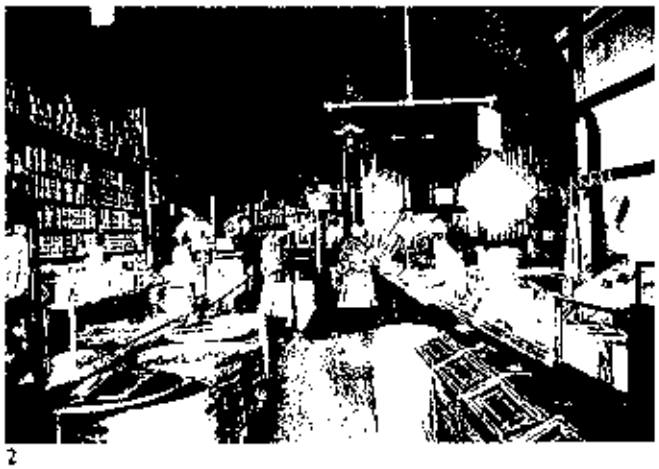
The initial concentration of business activity on North 24th Street reflected the earliest subdivision of the land. Since 24th Street formed a quarter section line, few land holdings extended across it. A variety of landowners held the property on either side of the street, and with no city regulations to ensure uniformity, land was laid out according to the owner's wishes. As a result, a number of streets begin or end at 24th Street. In addition, 24th was the bottom of the hill as land rose over 300 feet in several blocks to the west, making it an easily traveled north-south route. Streetcar lines and paved streets worked hand in hand with topographical features. Twenty-fourth was among the first streets to have a car line and paving, thus reinforcing its role as a main street. Businesses naturally congregated where great numbers of residents were traveling car lines or making transfers; thus 24th Street along with Lake Street, a main east-west car line, eventually became the center of a bustling business district.

The expansion of business activity on North 24th paralleled population growth of North Omaha in general. In 1885, Cuming Street was still the main commercial artery of North Omaha. No grocery, saloon or drugstore appeared on North 24th, although a few were located on North 16th and North 20th. By 1890, however, the layout and population of a number of North Omaha subdivisions also had an effect on commercial development. Although Cuming Street retained its business character, 24th Street experienced a boom of commercial expansion. Between Cuming and Charles alone, at least eight groceries, four saloons and three drugstores served North Omaha residents. Other concentrations of business activity were beginning to develop at 24th and Burdette, 24th and Lake and all along Lake at various corners. Grocery stores in particular were located on street corners throughout the residential neighborhoods south of Lake Street.[1]

By 1895, new businesses appeared in the northern half of the district, with three groceries and a saloon on 16th and 24th, and several grocery stores on North 30th Street around Pinkney and Pratt. Unlike the southern half of the district, few groceries or saloons appeared on street corners north of Lake Street.[2] No doubt Herman Kountze would not have permitted such land use in Kountze Place, with its emphasis on upper middle class status. Eventually, improved refrigeration methods made it easier to store goods for a longer period of time and reduced the number of grocery store trips. As

3. The Sherman, 16th and Lake Streets, 1984
The construction of the Sherman Apartments in 1897 was a first step in the transformation of North 16th Street from country estates to a heavily traveled apartment corridor. The Sherman's classical style of architecture reflected the movement away from flamboyant Victorian construction and toward the restrained architecture popularized by the Chicago and Omaha Expositions in the 1890's.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

4. 1407 North 17th Street
Omaha's multi-family housing never included tenements, but instead took the form of smaller apartment buildings such as this structure near 17th and Charles.
(Douglas County Historical Society)



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a result, residents no longer required grocery stores located within several blocks of their houses.[2]

Since the 1890's depression slowed business expansion, the commercial pattern did not change markedly by 1900. One new shopping area had sprung up near 16th and Corby, just a block south of the main streetcar route to East Omaha on Locust Street. The four groceries, three saloons and two drugstores probably centered around Corby Street because the intersection of Locust and 16th, which was a streetcar transfer point, was not yet available for commercial use. The entrance to the midway of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition was on 16th and Locust, and it took several years after the great fair before that land was platted for residences or any commercial expansion. The proximity of the fair no doubt provided business for the new shopping area, since the established routes for fair-goers were along the 16th and 24th Street car lines. The fair had a similar effect along 24th Street, with several grocery stores appearing on 24th at Binney and Wirt Streets.[3]

Another cluster of businesses located on the west side of 24th between Spaulding and Sprague, both of which were main connections between 24th and 30th Streets, and the Belt Line just beyond. Several houses had been built on each of the streets in the late 1880's and early 1890's so some residential neighborhood shopping needs existed in this vicinity. The corners on both sides of Sprague Street further illustrated the typical saloon pattern of the day, with each brewery operating its own retail outlet. On the southwest corner of the intersection the Krug Brewing Company of South Omaha erected a saloon designed by architect Joseph Guth in 1897; by 1903 the Metz Brewing Company built its saloon, designed by Henry Voss, on the northwest corner of the intersection. After the turn of the century, the block north of the Metz saloon was also built up with commercial structures.[4]

By 1910, the commercial pattern of North Omaha established North 24th Street as the main shopping center, with businesses distributed evenly between Paul and Ohio Streets. Grocery stores remained scattered on street corners throughout the residential neighborhoods south of Lake, with small clusters on 16th between Corby and Locust, and at 20th and Lake Streets. North of Lake, stores were limited to 16th, 24th and 30th Streets. The concentration on 24th remained between Spaulding and Sprague, while a new cluster formed at 24th and Ames, another important streetcar transfer point.[5]

Although the types and numbers of stores in North Omaha would change over time, the basic pattern of residential, commercial and industrial districts was set by the second decade of the twentieth century. Most of the district was settled by then, and the influences of public transit were already established. After that time a number of businesses would disappear as new methods of centralized marketing replaced neighborhood stores and residents could drive longer distances to do their shopping. However, new businesses would also come in, reflecting the changing ethnic groups that exerted influences upon the commercial neighborhoods of North Omaha.



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the 1880's steadily attracted more industries belching steam and smoke. The increasingly industrial character of the area made it more receptive to workers' housing than the mansions of the wealthy. By 1900, the well-to-do were living farther north in Kountze Place or had followed the more general pattern in Omaha and moved to neighborhoods farther west.

Omaha never experienced a great deal of tenement construction like other cities, and instead had a housing stock of small cottages for workers. As a result, when multi-family housing began to appear in the 1890's, it took the form of duplexes or smaller apartment buildings, rather than tenements. Duplexes appeared on side streets off Sherman Avenue (North 16th Street) as early as 1889, when one was built at 1609 Burdette. Omaha's notorious downtown Madam, Anna Wilson, erected two duplexes at 1607 Burdette and 2124 Sherman in 1891, while architect James B. Mason designed a Victorian style duplex at 1420 Sherwood in 1892.[6]

At the same time Sherman Avenue became established as the predominant streetcar line on the eastern edge of North Omaha. When all cars were electrified, remnants of old horsecar lines on 17th,

1. The Strehlow Terrace Apartment Complex, 2024 Sherman Avenue, 1929

Omaha's first apartment complex, built between 1905 and 1909, offered the newest architectural design, a formal landscaped courtyard and a variety of amenities for its residents (Nebraska State Historical Society)

2. Robert Strehlow, 1917

Strehlow, a German immigrant who had constructed Exposition buildings, combined his talents with architect Frederick Henninger to design the innovative Strehlow Terrace Complex. (Omaha Public Library)

3. Prairie Park Addition, 26th and Fowler Avenue, 1909

The first decade of the twentieth century brought a surge of new construction in North Omaha with new subdivisions being platted and

18th and 19th Streets were dropped and 16th became a main traveled artery. This role was firmly established by the Trans-Mississippi Exposition of 1898, as fairgoers frequently took the car line to the 16th Street midway entrance.

By the time of the Exposition, Sherman Avenue was already the site of the first multi-family unit in North Omaha to be termed an apartment house, the Sherman. Built in 1897 at Sherman and Lake, this classical style dwelling set the tone for the development of North 16th Street as an apartment row. The next big growth spurt occurred a decade later with Omaha's most innovative apartment buildings, the Strehlow Terrace complex at 2024 Sherman.[9]

Builder Robert Strehlow was a German immigrant who had learned carpentry skills in his native land. In America he became an exposition builder, erecting structures not only for Omaha's 1898 Exposition but for several other expositions in the following decade. His apartment complex project was far ahead of its time, with the buildings surrounding a long, landscaped courtyard and offering tenant amenities such as a tennis court, community house and garage. Strehlow's grand vision resulted from collaboration with noted local architect Frederick Henninger, whose design for the apartment buildings was enlivened with details derived from the Prairie School, the Arts and Crafts movement, and Japanese architecture. The Strehlow Terrace also encouraged further apartment construction, and between 1909 and 1916 another ten buildings went up on Sherman Avenue, thus establishing its twentieth century character as an apartment district.[10]

North of Lake Street, construction continued in the small subdivisions laid out earlier by numerous builders. Kountze Place, after gaining almost no new residences in the previous decade, also began to fill up south of Evans Street in the 1900's. The site of the Grand Court of the Exposition remained open through the decade, but the Bluff Tract which held the midway east of 16th was almost completely built up by 1910. For the first time the northernmost sections of North Omaha were built up as well. On both sides of 24th Street construction continued north to the industrial tract along the Belt Line. A streetcar line extension on Ames west of 24th also initiated construction there.[11]

The second great growth spurt in North Omaha brought variations in residential



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construction, as both vernacular types and high styles were altered from their 1880's character. Except for Kountze Place, the bulk of construction continued in a vernacular fashion, although often in an expanded version. The rectangular one-and-a-half story cottage increasingly became a full two- or two-and-a-half story dwelling, retaining the street-facing gable and front porch across the lower story, but often adding dormers and more windows at the second floor.[12]

In the years since the 1880's building boom, the expansive, elaborate Queen Anne had slowly given way to more closed, compact house forms and subdued detailing. The classical order and purity of Chicago's World Columbian Exposition and Omaha's Trans-Mississippi Exposition established this trend, which influenced the next generation of architects and builders of both high styles and vernacular structures. Thus, after 1900 a vernacular residence was more likely to have simple, Tuscan porch columns and a triangular classical pediment over the door than Eastlake gingerbread or fishscale shingles. In many cases, these houses, especially the simpler versions, were builder designed or adapted from pattern books. However, the compact, rectangular form was also utilized by architects who often added a few elegant details and built on a larger scale.[13]

At the same time these classical influences gave rise to a vernacular housing type which became the basis of pre-World War I construction — the "Classic Box." Composed of a square body of two-and-a-half stories, this cubic form dwelling often had a hipped roof, hipped dormers, broad eaves and a one-story porch across the front. The Classic Box was simple, economical and compact enough to fit on lots in most middle class suburbs. It also provided a basic form that could be left in its simplest appearance or carefully detailed. Common additions included a projecting side bay of one or two stories, a pediment over the entry, a side projection for a stair landing or

new construction in subdivisions platted in the 1880's.
(Douglas County Historical Society)

4. 3602 North 21st Street, 1984

This bungalow, constructed in 1911, exemplifies the Craftsman influence with its stucco and brick construction and bracketed eaves. It faces Kountze (Malcolm X) Park, the former site of the Grand Court of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

5. Classic Boxes, Evans Street, 1984

The classic box was a restrained, more compact house than the extravagant Victorian dwellings of the late nineteenth century and reflected changing architectural tastes and lifestyles.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

a front bay window. Classic Boxes were most prevalent in North Omaha in the area north of Lake Street where the new subdivisions were being laid out after 1900. The Classic Box filled in the vacant lots in Kountze Place, as well as streets farther north and west of 24th Street, such as Evans and Pratt, which were being developed for the first time.[14]

The pre-World War I era, particularly after 1910, introduced one more housing style to North Omaha. The Craftsman (Arts and Crafts) style, with an emphasis on wood craftsmanship and simplicity, provided a new school of thought on architectural details. Craftsman influences appeared in trim adorning Classic Boxes, but also set the stage for the popular bungalow dwelling which filled streets in the northern portions of the district.[15]

While many Craftsman-inspired residences were large, two-story dwellings, the bungalow was a small, cottage-like version with a broad, sheltering roof and simple lines. In North Omaha the bungalow was sometimes stucco or brick, but more often a wood or frame house. Some bungalows were built on Evans and Pratt Streets east of 24th, the former Grand Court of the Exposition, which was almost entirely filled up between 1910 and 1915. Others went up on the former Exposition midway east of 16th Street and on other empty portions of the bluff.[16]

Builders active in the period before World War I continued to utilize various earlier vernacular types as well as the new Classic Box and classical detailing. Clearly the most active builder in this period, and in fact throughout the entire development of North Omaha, was the real estate firm of Hastings and Heyden. Between 1903 and 1914 the company built almost 100 residences scattered throughout North Omaha, often constructing six or eight houses on one street. In general, Hastings and Heyden built modest one-and-a-half to two-story frame vernacular dwellings, with clusters of construction in the 2800 block of Corby, the 2800 block of Maple and the 3800 block of North 23rd. However, in Kountze Place the firm constructed larger dwellings, including two-and-a-half story Classic Boxes and other substantial homes on Lothrop and Spencer Streets.[17]

Although Hastings and Heyden was the most active firm in the pre-World War I era, other builders were also at work in North Omaha. Edward Smith built at least 30 residences between 1905 and 1917, scattered throughout the neighborhood, with no more than three to a street. Smith generally erected one-and-a-half to two-story frame vernacular dwellings, with only a few larger structures on Evans and Pinkney. The firm of Rasp Brothers, active between 1912 and 1919, constructed a number of residences with the characteristics of a popular type of bungalow. The approximately 25 houses they erected in North Omaha were frequently one-and-a-half stories with the gable ridge parallel to the street, and a large, central dormer on the upper story over an open front porch. While Rasp Brothers did not build great numbers of dwellings, they erected homes in keeping with new emerging trends.[18]



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The "New" Immigration

The concentration of Northern and Western European immigrants that populated America's cities before 1880 gradually gave way to increased numbers of Southern and Eastern Europeans. While the arriving Irish, Scandinavians and Germans became less predominant between 1880 and 1890, the totals of immigrants from the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires and Italy all more than doubled. In contrast to the Northern and Western Europeans, the new immigrants tended to settle in cities, particularly in the Northeastern United States,

1. Former San Alfio Hall, 1702 Clark Street, 1984
Once the center of an established Italian community, this building is now surrounded by an increasingly industrial neighborhood.
(Omaha City Planning Department)
2. Beth Hamedrosh Adas Jeshuran (now Tabernacle Church of Christ Holiness), 1521 North 25th Street, 1984

where they filled the demand for unskilled labor.[19] However, Omaha also had opportunities for these new settlers, not only in its industries but in the expanding wholesale and commercial trade. South Omaha attracted the bulk of Omaha's new immigration, especially the Czechs and Poles, to its packinghouses. North Omaha offered a better location for immigrants who worked in downtown trades and industries, such as Italians and Eastern European Jews. As the Germans, Irish and Scandinavians of North Omaha gradually scattered throughout the city, their residences were filled by this next wave of new Omaha residents.

A few Italians had settled in Omaha as early as the 1850's, but their numbers remained few until the 1900's when the Italian population increased from approximately 500 to 2300. The main Italian and Sicilian colonies in the city centered around 24th and Poppleton and 6th and Pierce, but a smaller cluster developed in North Omaha in the old Irish neighborhood around Holy Family Church.[20]



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Families living around 20th and Clark Streets formed the basis of this Italian neighborhood, which gradually encompassed the area from Locust to Izard and west to approximately 22nd Street. Primarily from Northern Italy, as opposed to Southern Italians and Sicilians, these immigrants frequently possessed job skills which helped them find employment in North Side industries. In 1916, more than one-third of Omaha's employed Italian males worked for the Union Pacific Railroad, mostly in the shops. Holy Family Church formed the center of community life, just as it had for the earlier Irish settlers. The church became predominantly Italian, receiving its first Italian priest and becoming an Italian National Parish in the 1930's. As late as 1940, Holy Family School was the only distinctly Italian parish school in Omaha, with 100 of the 140 students of Italian parentage.[21]

Like the other Italian churches in Omaha, Holy Family had a patron saint, San Alfio, the focus of an annual summer celebration. The first observance of the San Alfio Festival in Omaha was an eight-day event in June, 1929, centering on North 17th Street between Nicholas and Clark Streets. San Alfio Hall, at 1702 Clark, was a social-religious center for the neighborhood, as was the Christ Child Center at 1814 North 18th Street. These organizations typically offered classes and social activities for both adults and children, in the manner of social settlement houses. By the twentieth century, this neighborhood had experienced some deterioration as industry encroached from the south and east.[22] Small inexpensive cottages of the 1880's remained and were supplemented by new construction of the same variety, although often a little larger than the previous dwellings.



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At the same time that Italians were replacing Irish-Americans in the southeast corner of the district, they were joined by another group which exerted a more long-lasting influence in North Omaha, Eastern European Jews. The first Jews to arrive in Omaha were Germans, Austrians and Bohemians who considered themselves pioneers rather than immigrants. They had arrived as early as the 1850's and were largely Americanized and assimilated, since many of them had lived in other American cities before migrating west to Omaha. In contrast, the large number of Eastern European Jews who began arriving in the 1880's were refugees, persons who left their homelands to escape the restrictions placed on their ownership of land, mobility and religion. Many of them spoke only Yiddish and were Orthodox in religious practices, as opposed to the Reform outlook espoused by Omaha's first Jewish settlers. A Hebrew Benevolent Society was formed in the 1880's to assist the Eastern European refugees in getting established in Omaha.[23]

Before 1900, most Eastern European Jews lived downtown between 9th and 13th, Harney to Center, and particularly along South 10th between Harney and Leavenworth, where the new arrivals filled almost every house. Many of them operated shops or peddled goods, which allowed them to avoid working on their holy days. By 1905 this downtown community began to shift northward. The encroachment of business into their residence area, coupled with an estimated doubling of the Jewish population of Omaha between 1900 and 1914, caused many to move into the working class neighborhoods of North Omaha.[24]

Because many Jews went into business, they became particularly visible along the commercial streets of North Omaha, es-

When built in 1922, this synagogue was located in the heart of a Jewish residential neighborhood. It became the Tabernacle Church of Christ Holiness in the early 1950's.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

3. **Kuklin and Fried Meat Market, 1513 North 24th Street, 1919**

North 24th Street was the main Jewish business district in the city for the first two decades of the twentieth century.
(Nebraska Jewish Historical Society)

4. **Lake School, 19th and Willis Streets, March 26, 1914**

Although the racial balance in North Omaha was changing in 1930, Jewish students still comprised 20% of the pupils at Lake School.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)



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pecially North 24th. As early as 1900 a wide variety of Jewish grocers had stores throughout the district: Louis Gottstein at 1302 North 24th; Kohn and Rosencranz at 2124 North 26th; A. I. Kulakofsky at 1010 North 16th; and Israel Moskovitz at 1923 Clark. An analysis of North 24th Street merchants between 1912 and 1920 showed a wide variety of Jewish businessmen, including Max Fogel, meats, at 1204 North 24th; Sam Spiegal, junk dealer, at 1205-09 North 24th; Louis Pinkovitz, blacksmith, at 1314 North 24th; and Hersch Friedman, shoemaker, at 1405 North 24th.[25]

The Eastern European Jews who settled on the North Side brought a strong institutional presence to the neighborhood. Since many of them were Orthodox in religious outlook and walked to their synagogues, they tended to build houses of worship close to residence districts. Thus, congregations that had been started in downtown or Near South Side locations moved north and erected new buildings as their members moved into North Omaha.

The Lithuanian Jews first organized as B'nai Israel in 1889 and met on South 13th Street until 1911. They later reorganized as Beth Hamedrosh Hagodol and built a new house of worship at 19th and Burt. Russian Jews at first worshipped with the Lithuanians but later organized their own synagogue, Chevra B'nai Israel Adas Russia, the Society of Russian Israelites. They built their first synagogue on Capitol Avenue between 12th and 13th in 1889; in 1910 they dedicated a new synagogue at 18th and Chicago. Some members of this group later split from the congregation because they lived too far north to walk to services. They formed Beth Hamedrosh Adas Jeshuran and built a new synagogue at 25th and Seward in 1922. Hungarian Jews started a charitable society to provide sickness and death benefits which evolved into a congregation. In 1909, they purchased and remodeled the former Second Presbyterian Church at 24th and Nicholas and formed B'nai Jacob Anshe Sholem (later B'nai Jacob-Adas Yeshuron). That structure remained their home until 1949, when the building was moved to 3028 Cuming.[26]

Although the Reform synagogue, the Congregation of Israel, was located west of downtown, the bulk of Jewish institutions were located on the North Side. The Jewish Old People's Home opened in March, 1917, at 2504 Charles, with a bath house built next door on North 25th Street. A labor

lyceum, or working man's club, was built at 2203 Clark in 1922. The lyceum provided a library and social and educational activities, much like the various other social settlement houses around the city. It was eventually relocated to 30th and Cuming, adjacent to the synagogue which had also been moved. Jews had started a movement for their own hospital as early as 1899, when they occupied a building on Sherman Avenue near the Exposition grounds. From 1902 to 1907, they occupied the former J. J. Brown residence at 2225 Sherman Avenue, as the old mansions in that area increasingly shifted to institutional uses. They eventually built their new hospital just west of downtown at 24th Avenue and Harney in 1908.[27]

The Jewish community eventually settled throughout the area south of Lake Street. Although many would move westward and out of the area, a number of Jews remained in the neighborhood or maintained their businesses there for several decades. As late as 1930, students of Russian parentage made up about 20 percent of the children at Kellom and Lake Schools and 10 percent of Long School students.[28]

The 1913 Tornado

Most of the changes to the landscape of North Omaha were man-made and rested on decisions of individual landowners, builders and residents. However, in one brief period on March 23, 1913, North Omaha suffered a drastic transformation caused by a devastating tornado. About six o'clock in the evening on Easter Sunday, the storm swept through Omaha, beginning its destruction in the southwest corner of the city. It moved through the wealthy West Farnam and Bemis Park districts before hitting the hills at 30th Street near Parker and Franklin and inflicting its greatest damage at 24th and Lake. The path of the storm, four-and-a-half miles long and a quarter-mile wide, caused property damage estimated at $5 million.[29]

The tornado, which killed approximately 140 persons and injured another 350, also destroyed 1,800 homes and left 2,500 homeless. In the vicinity of 24th and Lake at least 60 people died. Newspapers declared that "in this closely settled neighborhood the damage was stupendous," and resembled "a battlefield after a terrific conflict." Seventeen men were killed in the collapse of Idlewild Pool Hall at 24th and Grant and another 12 persons in the ruins of the Diamond Theater at 2410 Lake.



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1. **Ruins of Idlewild Pool Hall, 24th and Grant Streets, 1913**
The Easter Sunday tornado of March 23, 1913, did its greatest damage in the vicinity of 24th and Lake. Seventeen men died in the collapse of Idlewild Hall.
(Nebraska State Historical Society)

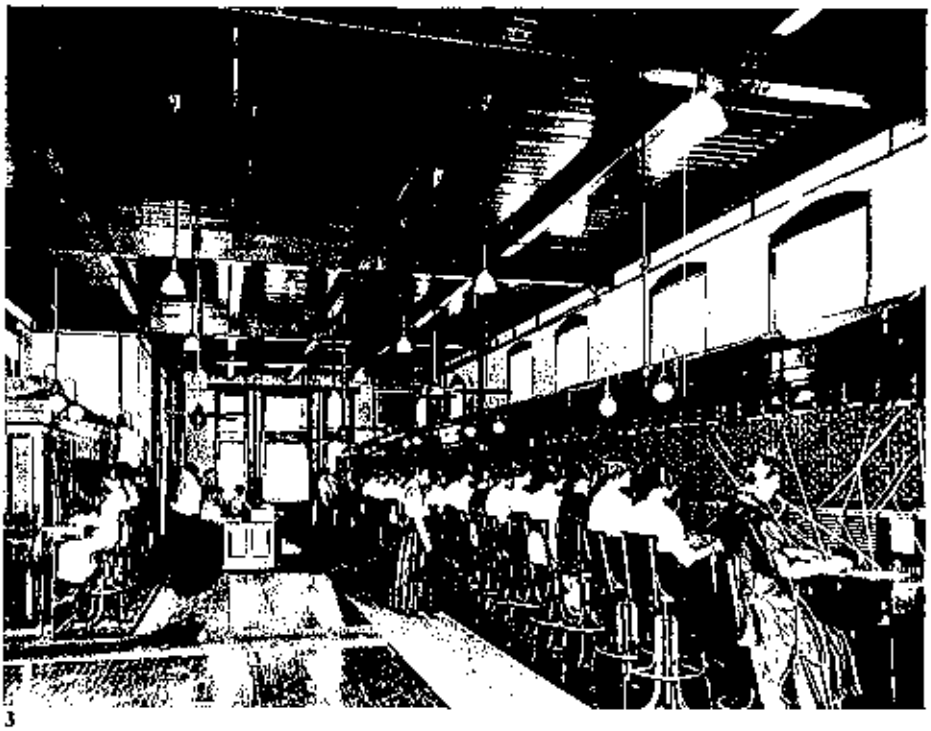
2. **Woman Viewing Tornado Debris, 1913**
The path of the storm cut diagonally across Omaha from 55th and Center to 14th and Spencer Streets, leaving property damage estimated at $5 million.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)

3. **Webster Telephone Exchange, 2213 Lake Street, 1907**
Although in the center of the tornado, telephone operators at the Webster Exchange remained on duty to assist tornado victims. The

building withstood the storm and today houses the Great Plains Black Museum.
(Douglas County Historical Society)

4. Tornado Damage, 24th and Lake Streets Looking West, 1913
(Douglas County Historical Society)

5. Victor Place, 16th and Victor Streets, 1984
Platted on the old Poppleton Estate in 1916, the subdivision of Victor Place featured new, more compact bungalows.
(Omaha City Planning Department)



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Among the churches suffering damage were the German-English Lutheran Church at 28th and Parker, Trinity Methodist Episcopal at 22nd and Binney, Zion Baptist at 22nd and Grant, and the Danish Evangelical Lutheran (Pella Lutheran) Church at 26th and Grant.[30]

The Webster Telephone Exchange at 22nd and Lake became a makeshift hospital since it was one of the few buildings left standing in the vicinity. Although all the building's windows had been blown out, the 25 telephone operators remained at their stations and assisted in the disaster effort. Soldiers from Fort Omaha arrived soon after the storm to patrol the hard-hit districts and lead the search for dead and injured buried in the rubble. The cleanup began with over $420,000 sent to Omaha from across the United States and funds raised through local charities. Omaha's Jewish community, in particular, diverted monies raised for their community center to the relief of tornado victims.[31]



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Rebuilding and New Construction

While North Omaha rebuilt following the tornado, the prosperity and expansion that marked the first decade of the twentieth century continued to encourage new construction throughout the city. The bulk of North Omaha building took place in the northern half of the district on land not previously utilized for residences. Once the U.S. entered World War I, however, construction slowed significantly. After 1916, virtually the only concentrated building in North Omaha was Victor Place at 16th and Victor Streets. This new subdivision was built up between 1916 and 1918 on the old Poppleton estate, one of the last 16th Street estates to give way to new construction. Even after the war when Omaha experienced a brief construction boom, North Omaha did not gain many more structures. New building was scattered and simply filled in the leftover land, as no large tracts were left for subdivision development. Thus by 1925 the entire North Omaha district was virtually filled, having been built up over a period of some 50 years.[32]

Although the physical development of North Omaha was largely complete by the 1920's, the landscape did not remain unchanged. Each group of people that resided in the neighborhood left its own distinctive cultural mark, whether it was the original landowners and builders or the various immigrants that settled for awhile and then moved on. The World War I era brought new residents that ultimately remained in North Omaha. Encouraged by job offers from the packinghouses and railroads, Southern blacks migrated to Omaha and settled on the North Side. Because their cultural contributions to the neighborhood have been great, the story of North Omaha in the twentieth century is primarily the story of Omaha's black community.



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1. The Shores Family, Westerville, Nebraska, 1887

While a majority of blacks settling in Nebraska lived in cities, some such as the Shores family homesteaded in rural areas.

(Solomon D. Butcher Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society)

2. Emory R. Smith

Smith was among Omaha's first black police-



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The Omaha Black Community Before World War I

While the story of North Omaha begins to focus on the black community by World War I, the history of blacks in the city dates back to the 1850's. Before concentrating on the development of the North Side as the center of black culture, it is important to examine the history of black settlement in Omaha before that time. This section focuses on the period before the first world war, before segregation became established and blacks lived throughout the city.

Blacks came to Omaha in the 1850's as part of the general movement west in that era. Since slavery was ended in Nebraska Territory in 1861, very few blacks were ever slaves in the state. After the Civil War, however, blacks from the rural South increasingly began to move to northern and western states, seeking homestead land, or jobs in urban centers. Nebraska was being settled by the 1860's, as railroads began to criss-cross the state. Some southern blacks were recruited as laborers for the construction gangs of the Union Pacific and Burlington Railroads. Others came and settled homesteads or worked as cowboys in Nebraska and other western states. The majority lacked the means to acquire a homestead, and frequently moved to cities such as Omaha. Despite the fact that blacks were limited in their occupational pursuits, cities still provided a wider variety of available jobs.[1]

Although the decade of the 1870's is often referred to as the first "great exodus" of blacks from the South, Omaha was not on a major path of migration for this group and experienced only a modest population increase. The real growth spurt for Omaha's black community occurred during the boom period of the 1880's that expanded all segments of the city's population, as the number of blacks increased from only 789 at the beginning of the decade to 4566 by 1890. Although the 1890's depression decreased their numbers, a vibrant, established community of several thousand still remained by the turn of the century.[2]

Work and Trade in the Black Community

At the turn of the century most blacks were limited in occupational choice to service or laboring positions. At the same time, however, a small group of black businesses was established, and continued to grow with the community. Because of the difficulty in securing financing, most businessmen operated smaller enterprises. They frequently concentrated on businesses which were often segregated such as drugstores, restaurants, barber shops and places of entertainment.

A 1900 occupational census identified 1,392 black men and 583 women as in the labor force. Among the males, 951 were engaged in domestic and personal service, with 375 of those employed as servants and waiters. Others were classified as laborers, janitors and barbers and hairdressers. A small, but significant number, 15 men, were employed as watchmen, policemen and firemen. As early as the 1890's the city maintained an all-black fire station at 30th and Spaulding. Later an all-black unit was housed at 21st and Lake, since the Omaha Fire Department remained segregated until 1957. Among Omaha's first black policemen were Emory R. Smith, appointed in 1903, and Harry Buford, appointed to the position of chauffeur in 1912. Buford later became known as the liaison between city boss Tom Dennison and the black community. Another early policeman was C.C. Dudley, who was appointed in 1918.[3]

The next largest employment group in 1900, trade and transportation, contained 262 men, over half of whom were porters and helpers. The others in trade and transportation were scattered in a variety of jobs, including teamsters, merchants and dealers, clerks, and salesmen. While only ten men were identified as clerks, they included men employed by the U.S. Postal Service. Very early, the Postal Service employed blacks in various capacities, and became an important employer within the community.[4]

Two other general employment categories included 43 professionals, and 127 men employed in manufacturing and me-

men at a time when blacks were often excluded from public service jobs.
(Great Plains Black Museum)

3. Mose Hall's Barber Shop
(Great Plains Black Museum. Courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society)

4. Dr. August Edwards
Dr. Edwards was among the growing corps of black professionals settling in Omaha at the turn of the century.
(Great Plains Black Museum. Courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society)

chanical pursuits. The professionals were primarily musicians, music teachers and clergymen, with smaller numbers of attorneys, physicians and journalists. The largest groupings under manufacturing and mechanical pursuits included 21 brick and stone masons, 15 plasterers and 12 engineers. In 1900 only nine men were employed in meat and fruit packing, a long way from the numbers of blacks that later filled this category. Blacks were used as strikebreakers in packinghouse strikes in 1894 and 1904, as well as in strikes against the railroads and smelter in Omaha.[5] However, they made few long-term gains from such activity and generally had trouble retaining these jobs after the strikes. Employers found it expedient to hire blacks as strikebreakers and then revert to their racist hiring practices later.

The employment categories for women were much more limited. Of the 583 employed women, 519 filled domestic and personal service roles. Servants and waitresses made up 298 of this grouping, followed by 158 laundresses, 20 housekeepers and 21 laborers. The other general categories were 15 professionals including eight musicians and music teachers; seven women employed in trade and transportation; and 38 women in manufacturing and mechanical pursuits, who were mostly dressmakers and seamstresses.[6]

Although black businessmen were limited to a few types of enterprises, their numbers and types of firms grew between 1895 and 1910. Beginning downtown in the 1890's and moving to North Omaha two decades later, the business community provided a focus for black Omahans who lived throughout the city.

In 1895 most black-owned businesses were located downtown, primarily between Capitol and Farnam, east of 15th Street. The bulk of businessmen were barbers, while four restaurants, all on Capitol or Dodge between 11th and 12th Streets, also served the community. Among other businesses in 1895 were the billiard room of Mahammitt and Ricketts at 1120 Capitol; the saloon of J.D. Wright at 105 South 12th; Alfred Bohanon's blacksmith shop at 1413 South 16th; and the grocery of Robert Phynix out at 1425 North 24th. Although the Phynix grocery pointed the way toward the future location of most black businesses, in 1895 the center of activity was especially centered around 11th, 12th and Dodge Streets.[7]



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While a number of these businessmen resided at their store or more probably in a flat above it, others lived in widely scattered locations. Barbers William C. Franklin, S.D. Goodchild and H.K. Hilton lived on Burdette and Patrick, west of 24th Street. Grocer Phynix resided at 33rd and Pinkney, while several other businessmen lived scattered around Omaha's Near South Side, especially South 16th Street.[8]

Only five years later the number of black businesses had increased and offered several new enterprises. By 1900 there were three grocers, including J.O. Adams at 201 North 11th, Fred Gray at 1721 St. Mary's, and Abner Travis at 5144 Sherman Avenue. A.W. Parker sold coal at 1710 North 24th, while Francis Franklin and Alfred Jones operated restaurants at 1202 Douglas and 113 South 14th. Two women, music teacher Cora Granby at 2212 Clark, and nurse Gertrude Johnson at 1514 Jackson, were also listed in 1900. Physicians J.H. Hutten and M.O. Ricketts listed downtown offices at 201 South 13th and 514 North 14th. Although there were a few more businesses in North Omaha by 1900, the concentration was still downtown along Dodge and Capitol. Residences of these businessmen were quite scattered, with some on the Near South Side, about a dozen in North Omaha, and the bulk of them in the downtown area.[9]

By 1910 the black community was clearly growing, with the number of businesses more than doubling the 1890 total. An even wider variety of firms were represented, including two boot and shoemakers, two laundries, a cigar store, several contractors, two tailors, and several hairdressers. The group of professionals in the community was constantly growing too, with Dr. Hutten joined by Dr. August Edwards and Dr. Matthew Williams. Dr. W.W. Peebles, a dentist, and attorneys Joseph Carr, H.J. Pinkett, Silas Robbins and F.L. Smith all had offices in downtown business blocks. Undertaker G. Wade Obec's establishment was at 1002 North 16th Street.[10]

In regard to location, the center of business had shifted west to about 14th and Dodge. The former center at 11th and 12th Streets was rapidly becoming Omaha's red light district, which forced other businesses out. Among the firms on 14th Street were the barber shops of Alfred Jones and Montgomery and Carnes, the billiard hall of Jewell and Phannix, the People's Drugstore managed by Orlando Barrett, insurance and real estate agent H.V. Plummer, and tailor Howard Livingston. The Frenzer Block at the southeast corner of 15th and Dodge provided offices for Dr. Hutten and attorney Robbins. One well-known black institution in Omaha during this period was Patton's Hotel, operated by Mrs. Minnie Patton at 917 South 11th Street. Mrs. Patton received a contract from the Union Pacific to provide for black railroad workers, and essentially operated a rooming house for them.[11]

Just as businesses had shifted their lo-



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1. Frenzer Block, 15th and Dodge Streets, 1879
When the black business district shifted to nearby 14th and Dodge by the 1900's, the Frenzer Block provided office space for several professional men.
(Nebraska State Historical Society)

2. Zion Baptist Church, 2215 Grant Street, 1959
The Zion Baptist Church congregation purchased the Grant Street site in the 1880's and

cations, so had their owners moved to new residences. In 1910 for the first time, the majority of businessmen lived on the North Side, north of Cuming Street. Most resided between Cuming and Lake west of 24th, although another group clustered between Cuming and Nicholas east of 24th. Billiard hall owners Jewell and Phannix lived quite far north, with Jewell at 3930 North 22nd and Phannix at 3702 North 23rd. Several others resided on the western edge of the city, such as barber Alfred Jones at 4318 Jackson, shoemaker Harry Curry at 4535 Burdette, hairdresser Lutie Bryant at 3308 Howard and attorney Silas Robbins at 916 North 42nd. Yet most black businessmen made their homes in North Omaha by 1910.[12]

Religious and Political Organizations

While many institutions were organized after the growth spurt of the 1880's, the churches, which provided the cornerstone of black community life, had already been formed. As historian John Hope Franklin has pointed out, the church's role as an agency "for maintaining group cohesion and rendering self-help" also made it a primary center of social activities within the community.[13]

The first church founded after blacks settled in Omaha was St. John African Methodist Episcopal in 1865. With a membership of five persons, the congregation first met at a residence at 9th and Capitol, and then purchased a lot at 18th and Webster for $450 in 1867. They constructed a church on the site which served as their home for almost 50 years.[14] In the late nineteenth century, St. John was among a number of large congregations that built churches in this area just north of downtown. By the second decade of the twentieth century, most gradually moved out as the neighborhood became more industrial and commercial.

A variety of Baptist churches sprang up, although not all were long-lived. The African Baptist Church met at 11th and Harney in 1876, while Zion Baptist was organized in 1884. By 1895 Mt. Pisgah Baptist met at 1123 Jackson, and five years later moved to 27th and Cass Streets. Another Baptist congregation, Mt. Moriah, had begun at 1121 Jackson by 1900. Ten years later it too moved north, to 2553 Seward Street.[15]

Of these Baptist churches, Zion was among the earliest which remained in existence. Zion started with a group that met

rebuilt this church after the 1913 tornado.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)

3. St. Philip the Deacon Episcopal Church, 21st and Paul Streets

St. Philip began as a mission of Trinity Cathedral and built a stone church on North 21st Street in the 1890's. The structure was torn down for the Kellom School project in 1949 and the congregation built a new church at 2532 Binney.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)

4. Dr. Matthew O. Ricketts

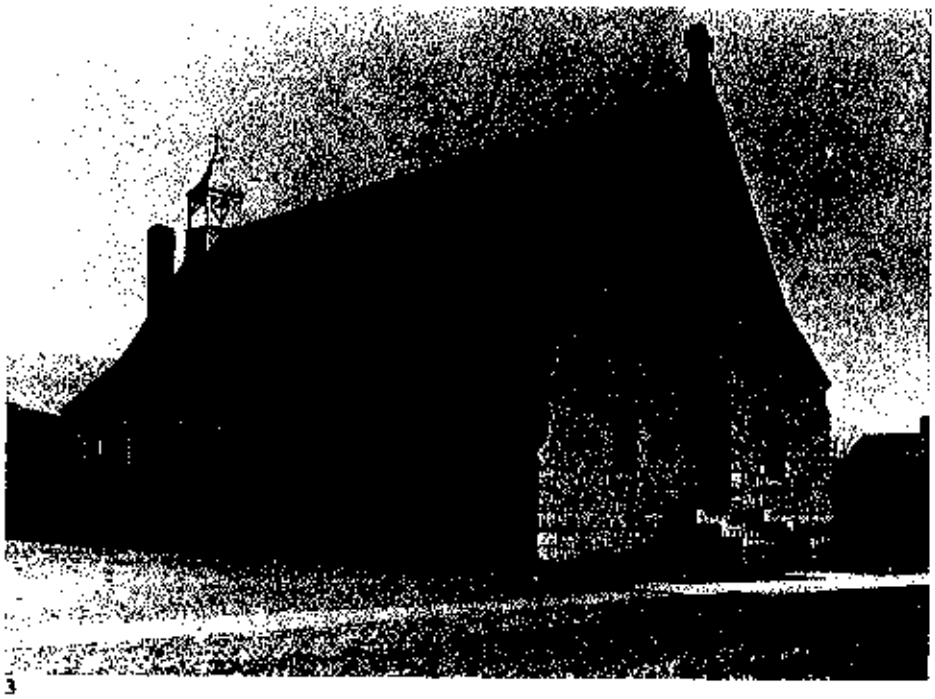
An early community leader, Dr. Ricketts was not only a physician but the first black representative in the state legislature.
(Nebraska State Historical Society)

in member's homes, and later moved their meetings to Lytle's Hall at 1116 Farnam. The congregation purchased land at 23rd and Grant and constructed a $5,000 church in 1888. The church hosted the annual meeting of the Interstate Literary Association of Kansas and the West on December 28-30, 1908. The association, made up of several hundred blacks from Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Colorado and Oklahoma, held a three-day convention to discuss "literary, social, sociological and economic questions." The 1913 tornado destroyed the church building, but it was rebuilt at the same location by 1920.[16]

Another early church was St. Philip the Deacon (Episcopal), organized in 1878. St. Philip's started as a mission of Trinity Cathedral, under the control of the Very Reverend Frank R. Millspaugh, Dean of Trinity. The mission, located at 9th and Farnam, was served by William A. Green, a black man named a deacon in the church by 1879 and raised to the priesthood four years later. Although Green left the mission in 1884, a new chapel was constructed near 19th and Cuming Street and was served by the rector of nearby St. Barnabas Episcopal Church. The church building was moved to a new site on 21st Street between Nicholas and Paul in 1890, and the following year the congregation secured its own leader with the arrival of Reverend John Albert Williams, a recent graduate of Seabury Divinity School at Faribault, Minnesota. Under Father Williams, a new stone church was erected at the site, which served as the home of St. Philip's until 1950.[17]

While the churches flourished, so did the various other institutions, particularly the newspapers. Newspapers always provided a clear indication of an established ethnic group, and blacks in Omaha had several from which to choose in the pre-World War I period. Ferdinand L. Barnett established the first black newspaper in Omaha, *The Progress*, in 1889. The Alabama-born Barnett was educated at Rusk School, Huntsville, Alabama, and Fisk University in Nashville before coming to Nebraska. Although in the newspaper business for 17 years, he later served as Deputy Clerk of Probate Court and Street Foreman for the city. In 1927 he represented Omaha's 10th District in the state legislature.[18]

Soon after Barnett began *The Progress*, two more newspapers appeared which provided a lively dialogue on black social activities and politics. Cyrus D. Bell operated



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the *Afro-American Sentinel* out of his house at 1842 North 22nd in 1892. Bell was quick to comment on political issues in his paper, and in a departure from the black population in general, usually supported the Democratic Party. In contrast, the *Enterprise*, begun by G.F. Franklin in 1892 and later published by Thomas P. Mahammitt, frequently backed the Republican Party in the 1890's.[19]

The newspapers and their party leanings provided insight into the period when blacks first exercised their political muscle in Nebraska. The great increase in Omaha's black population in the 1880's resulted in the election in 1892 of its first representative to the state legislature, Dr. Matthew O. Ricketts. Ricketts was born in Kentucky of slave parents, and grew up in Missouri. He moved to Omaha in 1880 and attended Omaha Medical College, graduating with honors four years later. Although he practiced medicine from 1884 until 1903 in Omaha, he also served as a representative in the House of the Nebraska Legislature for two terms, elected in 1892 and 1894. At least one author attributed Ricketts' influence with opening up positions for blacks in city, county and state government.[20]

Among the government positions opened to blacks was the City Inspector of Weights and Measures job, which was "by general acquiescence marked for the exclusive tenure of Negroes in the distribution of political plums." The position was first



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1. Masonic Lodge Band, 3115 Franklin Street, 1925
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)
2. Thomas F.Mahammitt,1905
T.F. Mahammitt and his wife were prominent members of the black community for over fifty years. Mahammitt was a newspaperman and held the City Inspector of Weights and Measures position, but he and his wife later became nationally known for their catering firm and cooking school.
(Omaha City Planning Department)
3. Silas Robbins
Robbins, admitted to the Bar in 1889, was the first black to practice law in the state. He was an active participant in the surge of local fervor that accompanied Populist politics in the 1890's.
(Great Plains Black Museum)



held by A.W. Parker, appointed by Mayor Richard C. Cushing in 1889, and later filled by Albert D. White in 1895. G.F. Franklin, editor of the *Enterprise*, held the job in 1896, and was succeeded by John W. Long the following year.[21]

Among the other political leaders in this era were Millard F. Singleton and Edwin R. Overall. Singleton was named a Justice of the Peace in Douglas County in 1885, two years after his arrival in Omaha. In 1896 he secured the Republican nomination for a state legislature seat, but lost the election. Singleton operated a real estate and loan office with A.D. White in the Crounse Building at 16th and Capitol, and was later a personal employee of Edward Cudahy at the Cudahy Packing Company. The Singleton family was active in social affairs and resided at 22nd and Charles from the 1890's until the 1920's.[22]

Edwin R. Overall was an early settler, arriving in Omaha in 1869. Employed as a mail carrier for the post office, he was also involved in a number of political, social and fraternal groups. As a political leader he ran unsuccessfully for the City Council on the Populist ticket in 1893. Overall was a Mason and an officer of the Missouri and Nebraska Coal Company. In addition, he actively participated in national race organizations. In September, 1872, he was elected president of the National Convention of Colored People at St. Louis, while in 1898 Overall directed the Omaha meeting of the Congress of White and Colored Americans. He and his family resided at 20th and Lake Streets.[23]

Political activity in urban centers of the late nineteenth century frequently centered around the ward, with specific clubs formed to back parties or candidates. Omaha's black community was no exception and spawned a variety of such organizations in the 1890's. Cyrus D. Bell and attorney Silas Robbins invited "all Afro-Americans who are interested in maintaining the independence of the United States in respect to its monetary system" to a meeting of the William J. Bryan Free Silver Club in 1896, while the Colored Women's McKinley Club was established later that year. Other groups were more sustained than one election campaign, such as the Colored Working Men's Republican Club of the sixth ward, and the Sumner Club, formed to "promote the interest of Afro-Americans in Omaha," but described by Democratic editor Bell as a group of "dyed-in-the-wool Republicans."[24]

The newspapers at the turn of the century also reflected the concern for racial equality and efforts to obtain it in Omaha. Cyrus Bell's *Sentinel*, in particular, focused on issues regarding advancement of the race. Occasionally, Bell reprinted articles of interest from other black newspapers, but more frequently dealt with local subjects. In October, 1896, Bell reported that Dr. M.O. Ricketts had been denied service in a restaurant for refusing to dine in the kitchen. Although Ricketts took the case to District Court, the restaurant owner was acquitted. The Western Negro Press Association met in Omaha in 1898, and passed resolutions indicative of the effort to achieve racial equality. The resolutions included elements calling for the elevation of Negro journalism and the race as a whole; the denouncing of "mobocracy" as revealed in the southern states; and praise for the achievements of black soldiers in the Spanish-American War.[25]

The concern over "mobocracy" by the Press Association was a response to the wave of lynching that swept the South. Although the crime was not as frequent in northern states, it still occurred, including lynchings in Omaha. In 1891 (and again in 1919) a black man was falsely accused of assaulting a white girl, seized from his jail cell, and hanged. In 1891 George Smith was arrested and jailed in the Courthouse for the alleged assault of a young girl. When rumors that the girl had died were circulated, a mob stormed the Courthouse. Despite efforts by authorities to halt the mob, Smith was dragged out and hanged at 17th and Harney. It was later discovered that the report of the girl's death was false.[26] Certainly a crime as widespread as lynching brought the battle for racial equality to the forefront among blacks not only in Omaha, but throughout the country.

Social Life — Clubs and Fraternal Groups

In recent years historians have examined the importance of voluntary associations in late nineteenth century urban life. A variety of clubs and fraternal associations helped bring order and stability to Americans to whom cities were unfamiliar. At the same time a highly mobile population used social organizations as a means of getting established within a community and meeting other residents of similar status and character. Americans formed voluntary associations for a variety of reasons, from reform purposes to social activities, or as mutual benefit groups that operated much like modern insurance companies. In many cases organizations were comprised of particular ethnic groups, especially the most recent arrivals from Europe. Others, like

fraternal lodges, contained a variety of persons without specific ethnic ties. However, these groups were rarely integrated. As a result, black urban residents formed what scholar Allan Spear has termed an "institutional ghetto," organizations for blacks operating parallel to those serving whites.[27]

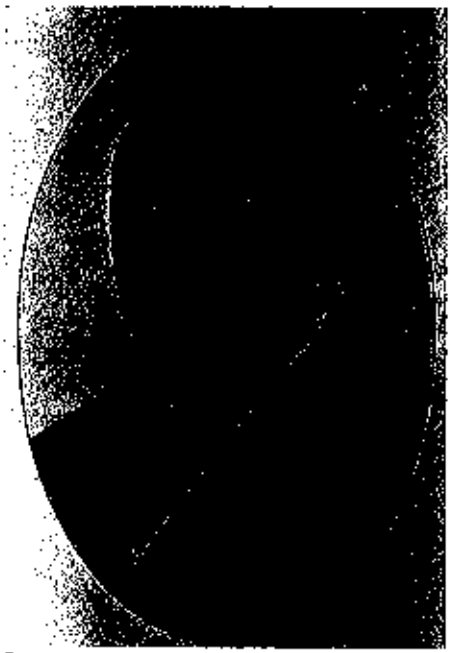
Omaha's black community organized a number of social, religious and fraternal organizations. Fraternal groups were particularly important, and newspapers regularly listed the meeting times, locations and officer's names. Among the lodges were the Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, and Masons, all of which met at Central Hall, 107 South 14th Street. The Masons were particularly popular, with at least four lodges: the Eureka Chapter, Excelsior Lodge, Rough Ashlar and Ivanhoe Commandery. One women's group, the Busy Bee Tent No. 51, met at the Crounse Block, 16th and Capitol.[28]

Organizations for women appeared to be primarily social, literary and religious groups. Foremost among these associations was the Women's Club. Organized early in 1895, the club intended to take "an active, decided and aggressive interest in everything that tends toward promoting the welfare of mankind in general, and of womanhood in particular, and of the Afro-American specifically." Like many women's groups of the day, their monthly meetings consisted of musical presentations and papers presented by members on various subjects. The club and its members were affiliated with national organizations as well and sent in annual dues to the National Federation of Afro-American Women. As early as 1895 two leaders in the Women's Club, Mrs. Ella (Helen) Mahammitt and Mrs. Laura M. Craig, made plans to attend the Congress of Colored Women at Atlanta. By 1897 the club rented a hall at 24th and Charles for upcoming meetings, because the group had grown too large to gather in members' homes.[29]

Ella (Helen) Mahammitt was not only a club leader, but active in the community. She wrote a weekly column on women's interests and the Women's Club for the *Enterprise* and with her husband, Thomas, later established a catering firm and cooking school in the city. Their business earned a national reputation and resulted in the publication of a cookbook detailing their catering and cooking techniques. Thomas Mahammitt published the *Enterprise* after G.F. Franklin, and was appointed Inspector



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of Weights and Measures several times. He was also a successful scout leader, and his troop, in 1940, had produced more Eagle Scouts than any other Boy Scout troop in the country. The Mahammitts resided at 1814 North 25th Street in the 1890's.[30]

Besides the Women's Club, a number of church groups and other clubs provided social activities. The newspapers provided a complete listing of civic-type organizations, noting the formation of a Women's Improvement Club in 1897, a Progressive Club for women in 1898, and the Crescent Club's "Calico Concert and Ball" in 1897. The Triumvirate Club sponsored a variety of activities, such as a special summer excursion by rail to Fremont, and annual Thanksgiving and Christmas balls, which, newspapers reported, attracted the "young bloods of Omaha's Afro-American populace."[31]

Church groups received attention in the newspapers as well, particularly the Epworth League, an established organization which met weekly at St. John A.M.E. Church. Like the women's groups they focused on literary and intellectual programs and music presented by the members. In addition, there were meetings of other church clubs, annual Sunday School picnics at Elmwood and Hanscom Parks, and "lawn fetes," which were outdoor summer parties held at church members' homes.[32]

Community Leaders

In the pre-World War I era, community leadership was provided by men and women active in politics, business and social life. However, there were other residents, many of whom were well educated professionals, who also exercised an important role. Silas Robbins, the first black to practice law in Nebraska, was admitted to the Bar in 1889. He participated in Populist politics and later held a position in the Douglas County Tax Assessor's office. Fred L. Smith came to Omaha to practice law in 1895. He received his law degree from Wilberforce University and practiced in Iowa and Indiana before opening an office with fellow attorney E.H. Hall. Two other attorneys in practice by 1916 were James Carr and A.P. Scruggs, who shared offices at 220 South 13th.[33]

A well-known attorney active for four decades was Harrison J. Pinkett, a graduate of Howard University. Pinkett worked as an Inspector with the Board of Charities in Washington, D.C. before coming to Omaha in 1907. One of the organizers behind the Omaha chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1914, he devoted a good deal of time to the Association's legal work. Pinkett opposed the political machine of Tom Dennison and worked to destroy it for almost a quarter century.[34]

Omaha's black community was also served by many physicians, beginning in the 1880's. Although Dr. Ricketts was among the first physicians, his colleague, Dr. W.H. Stephenson, came to Omaha in 1890. Later, Dr. Jesse H. Hutten, Dr. L.E.



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1. **Isaac Bailey House, 2816 Pratt Street, 1984**
The Bailey residence was one of the first designed by Clarence Wigington, a black architect active in Omaha from 1908-1916.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

2. **Broomfield Apartments, 2502-10 Lake Street, 1984**
Jack Broomfield, a downtown saloonkeeper who was affiliated with city boss Tom Dennison, built these apartments at 25th and Lake in 1913. Designed by Clarence Wigington, the apartments represented increasing black investment in the area around 24th and Lake.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

3. ***The Women's Aurora*, 1909**
This early magazine for black women was published monthly at 2322 North 24th Street by Lucille Skaggs Edwards, a businesswoman and wife

Britt, and Dr. August Edwards opened offices downtown, while Dr. Matthew Williams practiced at 1714 Webster. By 1916 they were joined by Dr. J.B. Hill at 1324 North 24th and Dr. D.W. Grooden at 2211 Cuming. Dr. Hutten came to Omaha in 1899 as a graduate of Howard University in Washington. His long career spanned forty years, during which he helped organize the Urban League and establish a black Presbyterian church in Omaha. Several dentists who had offices in Omaha included Clarence and John A. Singleton, two sons of Millard Singleton; W.W. Peebles, and Craig Morris.[33]

Yet one other professional in the community was architect Clarence W. Wigington. Wigington began work as a draftsman for noted Omaha architect Thomas R. Kimball in 1902. In 1908 he resigned to open his own office, and designed the home of Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Bailey at 2816 Pratt. The *Enterprise* called the home the first "that was ever built in Omaha from the plans of a colored architect and it is the opinion of every person that has seen it that his efforts have been very successful." Although the building permit identified Wigington as architect of the original Zion Baptist Church destroyed in the 1913 tornado, residences made up the bulk of his Omaha work. Between 1912 and 1914 he designed nine houses, including those of Dr. L.E. Britt at 2519 Maple and undertaker G. Wade Obee at 2518 Lake, and Jack Broomfield's duplex at 2502-10 Lake Street in 1913. Wigington utilized a variety of styles, including both Classic Boxes as well as vernacular forms enlivened by the Arts and Crafts influences just emerging in architectural circles. Despite his productive two years, Wigington, Omaha's first black architect, moved to St. Paul, Minnesota by 1916.[34]

While few women held professional positions in Omaha, there were two black teachers, Lucy Gambol and Eula Overall. Miss Gambol, who later married John Albert Williams of St. Philip's Church, began teaching in 1895 and continued until 1901. Eula Overall, daughter of E.R. Overall, taught from 1898 until 1903. After their tenure the public schools failed to hire any black teachers until 1939.[35]

Several other women contributed significantly to community activities. Lucille Skaggs Edwards published *The Women's Aurora* in 1906, becoming the first black woman to publish a magazine in Nebraska.

of Dr. August Edwards.
(Great Plains Black Museum)

4. Elnora Brooks Jones

Elnora Jones and her husband Alfred were both business and social leaders from the 1890's until the 1930's.
(Douglas County Historical Society)

5. Ellsworth W. Pryor and Son

Ellsworth Pryor, as steward of the Omaha Club for many years, was responsible for many of the city's most gala receptions and parties.
(Great Plains Black Museum)

6. Reverend John Albert Williams

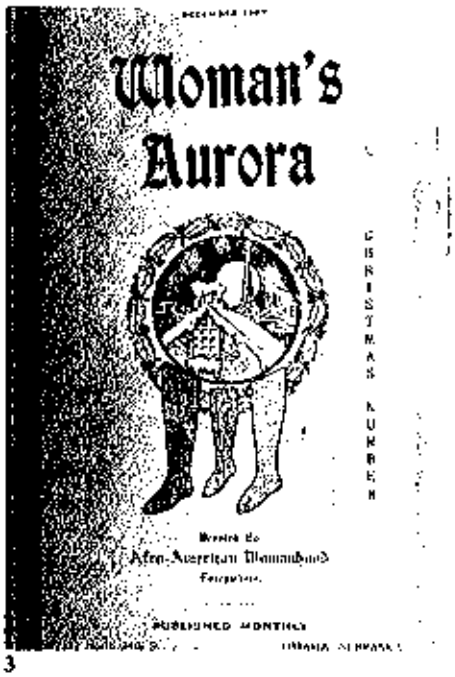
John Albert Williams, rector of St. Philip's Episcopal Church for forty years and editor of the *Omaha Monitor* from 1915-1929, was an eloquent leader at a time when the black community was expanding rapidly.
(Nebraska State Historical Society)

She was a notary public and stenographer, and was employed in the office of the Clerk of the District Court. The family of Elnora Brooks Jones was one of the first black families to settle in Omaha. In 1892 she married Alfred Jones, a leading businessman who led a "varied and colorful career" as an operator of barber shops, cafes, entertainment halls and real estate and insurance agencies. By the mid-Teens, the Jones family resided at a beautiful white, two-story, columned home reminiscent of a plantation mansion, at 2811 Caldwell Street. Named Hillcrest, the residence was the site of numerous parties, concerts, church and social activities through the 1930's.[38]

Another resident, well-known by black and white Omahans alike, was Ellsworth W. Pryor. Pryor, a Howard University graduate, arrived in Omaha in 1888, and from then until the 1920's was a steward and caterer at the Omaha and Commercial Clubs. His abilities were recognized as early as 1897, when the *Enterprise* called him a "living example after which young men may well afford to pattern their aspirations and lives." As steward for the Omaha Club, which served the wealthiest men in the city, Pryor set a standard for excellence that won him praise from Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. In all, the staff under Pryor's command served six presidents, and catered a variety of receptions for Omaha families, including the first Ak-Sar-Ben coronation balls. Pryor resided at 1414 North 25th Street for over 40 years.[39]

One other leader who influenced the community from his arrival in 1891 until his death in 1933 was the Reverend John Albert Williams, rector of St. Philip's Church throughout his life. He came to St. Philip's after his graduation from divinity school, and devoted his life to religion, writing and the advancement of the race. The scholarly Williams wrote occasional columns for the *Enterprise* and later started the *Omaha Monitor*, described as the "best known and most widely read of all Nebraska Negro newspapers" during its publication between 1915 and 1929. Williams' long-time service in Episcopal affairs earned him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree and the Cross of Honor, Order of Sangreal, a high Episcopal honor rewarding his distinguished career.[40]

Williams' *Monitor* served as the voice of the black community through an important period when it experienced a great up-



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surge in population and weathered the riot of 1919. The Teens were a volatile era in black history, bringing the second great migration as ever-increasing numbers of blacks left the South in search of better opportunities. Brought on by southern crop failures and promises of jobs in northern industries, the migration caused urban black populations to swell. Omaha, too, experienced an increase in black population, which more than doubled from 4426 in 1910 to 10,315 by 1920. During World War I and the decade following, black population growth and white racism led to the development of a ghetto on Omaha's Near North Side, as the community's location became concentrated. At the same time, however, the 1920's brought a flowering of the black community in business and institutional growth, focused on North 24th Street.



1. A Southern Family Arriving in Chicago, ca. 1916
The Great Migration of the Teens brought entire families from the rural South to Northern industrial cities such as Chicago, Omaha, and Detroit.
(Ebony Collection, Vol. II)

The Development of North Omaha Between the Wars

The decade between 1910 and 1920 was pivotal in establishing segregation and the development of Omaha's Near North Side as a ghetto. From the creation of an integrated NAACP in 1914 and ending with the 1919 riot, this period brought intense changes to the lives of Omaha blacks. What occurred in Omaha, however, was similar to events in other cities receiving increased numbers of Southern migrants in search of work. Old established black communities and institutions were suddenly forced to deal with newcomers, many of whom were unfamiliar with urban life and work. Industries hired blacks to fill a variety of jobs during World War I, but when both black and white soldiers returned, the post-war economy was unable to absorb them. A shortage of jobs, added to labor unrest and strikes, made 1919 a turbulent year. At the same time, racial hostilities boiled over and city after city experienced violent race riots.

The Great Migration

The World War I era, known as the "Great Migration" because an estimated one million blacks left the South, occurred as a result of both "push" and "pull" factors. The crisis that struck Southern agriculture in the Teens was one of the strongest "push" factors. The old sharecropping system established after the Civil War restricted the profits tenants could make, since all products were shared with the landowner. Along with the outdated system, an infestation of boll weevils in 1915 and 1916 destroyed cotton crops and forced landowners to lower wages or release their workers. Southern cities had attracted new industries and jobs, but blacks were often excluded from hiring. Despite some changes, the South remained segregated and offered little to blacks except disenfranchisement and a lack of opportunities.[1]

Meanwhile, Northern industries were hungry for laborers. The war shut off their supply of immigrants and with many of their workers serving as soldiers, big industries sent agents into the South to recruit inexpensive labor with promises of free transportation and high wages. The North became the "land of promise" for blacks and one author stated that "the movement spread like wild fire." The biggest pull from industries occurred when the labor shortage was most critical between 1916 and 1919; by the latter year a business recession ended the greatest needs.[2]

This migration was not a gradual process as it had been before World War I, but a truly mass movement. It not only affected blacks but became a major social epoch that changed the look of cities. As more and more blacks moved north, white urban dwellers became fearful of the increasing black population. The newcomers found homes in neighborhoods where other blacks lived and when whites began to move out, these districts were converted from mixed neighborhoods into almost exclusively black areas.[3]

Formation of the Ghetto[4]

While Omaha's blacks had steadily continued to move into the Near North Side by 1910, they were not predominant until several decades later. Several forces helped contribute to the development of Omaha's Near North Side as a segregated ghetto. Blacks had lived all over the city, but began to move to the North Side by 1910. Photos of the 1913 tornado revealed that a number of blacks already resided in North Omaha by that time. The majority of men killed in the collapse of the Idlewild Pool Hall were black. The destruction caused by the storm prompted some North Omaha residents to move out rather than rebuild in the area.

At the same time the area was not established as any ethnic group's "turf." South Omaha and the Near South Side were already carved into tight ethnic communities of Southern and Eastern Europeans by 1910. Because the North Omaha ethnic groups of Irish, Scandinavians, and Germans formed no solid neighborhoods by 1910, their areas were more receptive to newcomers. Eastern European Jews had moved into the area in the previous decade. When greater numbers of blacks began to settle in the city, North Omaha remained fluid and available to new residents.

Perhaps the biggest factor in the concentration of the black community was its numerical growth. With a population that doubled to reach 10,315 by 1920, sheer numbers caused reactions from Omaha's white and black communities. The doubling of the population frightened white Omahans, who found it harder to ignore the growing black population. The resulting hostility and racism forced blacks' initial settlement into segregated neighborhoods. Until the 1950's, blacks were generally restricted to the area between 20th and 33rd, Cuming to Spencer Streets, with some settlement north of Adams Park.[5] The tensions which filled the country after World War I strained all interaction between the races and helped to develop strict segregation in many cities. The race riots, including the lynching in Omaha, were symptoms of the social climate that prevailed in the United States.

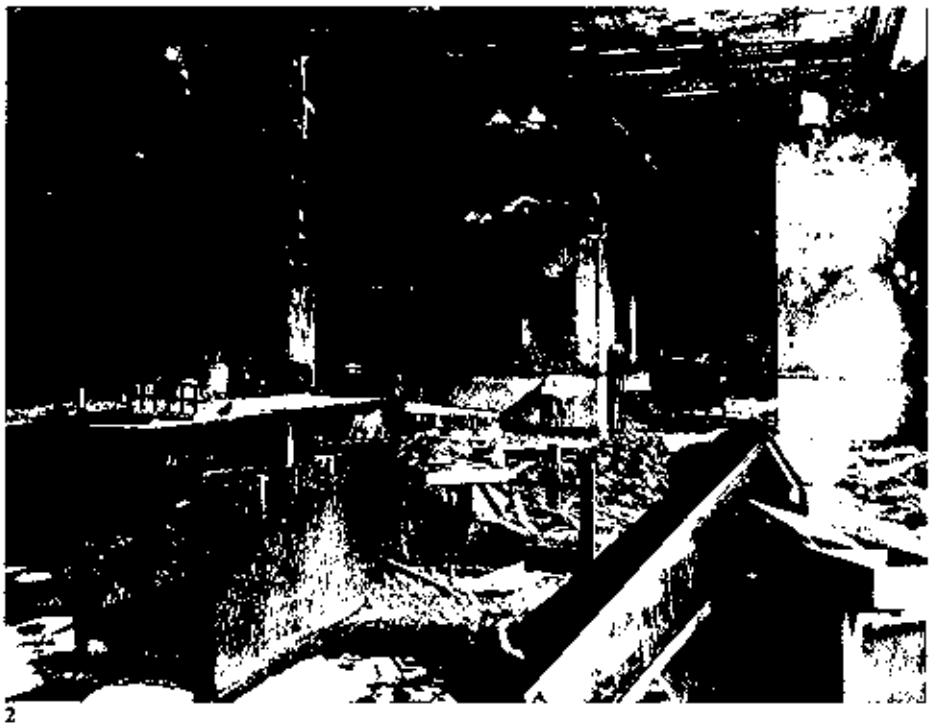
2. Interior of Douglas County Courthouse after 1919 Riot

The 1919 courthouse riot was Omaha's worst hour. It led to the lynching of Will Brown, the near-lynching of Mayor Ed P. Smith and extensive damage to courthouse records and property. (Nebraska State Historical Society)

3. Tom Dennison, Omaha's "Boss"

Dennison controlled Omaha for over 30 years without ever holding a public office. Many believed he orchestrated the 1919 riot for political gains.

(Omaha World-Herald, Courtesy Orville D. Menard)



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The 1919 Riot and Local Politics

Omaha experienced a riot in 1919 in which a black prisoner was seized from the Douglas County Courthouse and lynched. Unlike other cities, however, where white and black persons fought armed conflicts and attacked each other's neighborhoods, the Omaha riot was a lynching with the hostilities confined to downtown. Omaha's disturbance was also connected to local politics and the previous municipal election.

Since the turn of the century, political boss Tom Dennison controlled city government by bestowing favors on Omahans in return for their votes. He never held office himself, but pulled the strings behind the scenes through "Cowboy" James Dahlman, Omaha's mayor for almost 25 years.[6] Dennison maintained his power by establishing contacts within each ethnic group in the city. His first black lieutenant was Vic Walker, owner of the Midway, one of the most notorious saloons in the Red Light District. After Dennison and Walker quarreled in 1901, Jack Broomfield, who ran a saloon at 111 South 14th, took his place. Even later, policeman Harry Buford served as Dennison's link with the black community.[7]

The one lapse in Mayor Dahlman's quarter-century career occurred in 1918-1921, when Omahans elected a reform ticket in an effort to get rid of Dennison's machine. Dennison supposedly told his cohorts it was time to let the reformers have their chance in office — after one term the citizens would be glad to welcome back the machine. Attorney Ed P. Smith, elected mayor on the reform ticket, had a difficult term filled with various strikes through the summer of 1919. The *Bee* and *Daily News* stirred up racial hostilities by concentrating press coverage on a supposed crime wave of alleged sexual assaults of white women by black men. The stories of arrests made front page headlines but the subsequent releases of innocent men were seldom mentioned.[8]

In late September the police arrested Will Brown, a black packinghouse worker who was unemployed because of rheumatism, for the alleged assault of Agnes Loebeck. Brown was kept in jail at the Douglas County Courthouse for three days and by September 28th, a Sunday afternoon, a mob of 6,000 demanded the prisoner. Initially policemen wielding nightsticks and fire hoses held them back, but the mob broke down the doors and set fire to the building. Mayor Ed Smith and his police commissioner, J. Dean Ringer, tried to reason with the crowd, but rowdies seized the Mayor, put a noose around his neck and hanged him from the metal arm of a traffic light tower. A policeman managed to rescue the Mayor and save his life, but officers could not keep the mob from Will Brown. As policemen tried to evacuate the prisoner from the burning courthouse down a back stairway, the mob grabbed Brown, beat him and hanged him from a telephone pole at 18th and Harney. The crowd shot the body hundreds of times, then paraded it through the streets and burned it.[9]

Eventually, the city was placed under martial law, and troops from Fort Omaha led by General Leonard Wood patrolled several areas. General Wood suspected that the riot was "due to an organized effort which could be traced back to the criminal gang which ruled Omaha." He also discovered that a regular taxi service had operated on the 28th, bringing extra men to the riot from various spots in the city. Reverend John Albert Williams echoed General Wood's feelings in the *Monitor*. He saw behind the riot "the hidden, but not wholly concealed hand of those who would go to any extreme to place themselves in power." Williams also chastised the sensational reporting of the *Bee* and the *News* for their part in agitating Omaha's citizens.[10]

Over one hundred persons were arrested for their part in the riot but few were ever punished. The extent of Tom Dennison's control over the riot has never been determined. He was conveniently out of town on September 28th. Whatever the true cause of the riot, it served Dennison's purposes well, since in May, 1921, voters returned Dahlman and the rest of the machine slate to city government.[11]

1. Dr. John A. Singleton
Nebraska House of Representatives, 1927
(Nebraska Blue Book)
2. Dr. Aaron M. McMillan
Nebraska House of Representatives, 1929
(Nebraska Blue Book)
3. John Adams, Jr.
Nebraska House of Representatives and Unicameral, 1935-1941



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Despite the probable orchestration of the riot, the black community was somewhat divided over Tom Dennison. His lieutenants and some businessmen worked with him, and many Omahans believed there was more control over crime in the city when Dennison was in charge. Yet others, like Reverend Williams and attorney Harrison Pinkett, saw nothing but evil in Dennison's organization. By the late 1930's, Pinkett wrote that the machine precipitated a "number of years of political degradation rarely ever surpassed" in the black community. He pointed out that when Dennison brought Vic Walker, and then Jack Broomfield into his operation, the political gains made earlier under the leadership of men like Millard Singleton, E.R. Overall and Dr. M.O. Ricketts were lost. Pinkett wrote that under Dennison, "where we formerly had colored teachers in the schools, we had none; where colored men and women held remunerative positions in government, other racial groups gained them." The political clout that diminished under Dennison reasserted itself by the late 1920's, when black legislators were again elected after a quarter century lapse.[12]

When the community flexed its political muscle, it came in force. The 9th and 10th District representatives to the Nebraska House in 1927 were Ferdinand L. Barnett and Dr. John A. Singleton. Barnett had begun the first black newspaper in Omaha, *The Progress*, in 1889 and later served as Deputy Clerk of the Probate Court and City Street Foreman before holding office. John Andrew Singleton was one of the dentist sons of Millard Singleton. Born in Omaha in 1895, John Singleton received his DDS from Howard University. He had previously held the position of Deputy Register of Deeds of Douglas County and had been a delegate to the Republican County Central Committee in 1926.[13]

Dr. Aaron McMillan represented the 9th District in the House in 1929. He began medical practice in Nebraska after his graduation from Meharry Medical College at Nashville, Tennessee, in 1923. Like his predecessors to the legislature from North Omaha, McMillan was active in county and state Republican work before his election. In 1929 after completing only half his term, Dr. McMillan resigned his office to accept a position as a medical missionary in Angola. George Hibbler filled the remainder of McMillan's term. Eventually, Dr. McMillan returned to Omaha where he was on the staff of Methodist and Children's Hospitals.[14]

In 1932, the 9th District elected its first black Democrat, Johnny Owen. Owen was well known for being the only four-sport black athlete in any Nebraska high school. At the time of his election he was studying law at Creighton University. Two years later the 9th District elected another attorney, John Adams, Jr., who served until 1941. Adams received his law degree from the University of Nebraska in 1929 and had previously run for a House seat in 1933 before winning the 1934 election. His father, John Adams, Sr., an Omaha attorney for over 40 years, served in the legislature in the 1950's.[15]

North 24th Street — The Heart of the Community

North 24th Street remained a relatively vibrant commercial district through World War II. Neighborhood residents patronized black and white businessmen, and many of them remained at the same location for several decades. The southern end of the street was primarily Jewish in focus, while the area from approximately Patrick Street north held the bulk of black businesses. Among the black businessmen was Milton Johnson, who operated a drug store at 1904 North 24th Street. R.C. Price and E.W. Killingworth were longtime barbers who owned their building at 2416 North 24th Street. Both were active in civic groups including the American Legion and Knights of Pythias, and Price served as president of the NAACP. The Shipman brothers, road building contractors, had business throughout several states. Among the long lasting white businessmen present in 1926 were Reid-Duffy Pharmacy at the southwest corner of 24th and Lake and Tuchman Brothers Grocery on the northwest corner adjacent to Peterson's bakery. Tuchman remained for a decade, and Peterson and Duffy until the 1960's.[16]

Black businesses located on Lake Street were the J.P. Waddle Barber Shop at 2411, the *New Era* newspaper at 2412 and the Omaha Waiters' Association at 2427 Lake. Allen Jones constructed a brick one-story building at 2216 North 24th in 1923 and utilized it as a mortuary, while three years later Oscar Ricketts erected a brick building at 2307 North 24th. Both structures be-

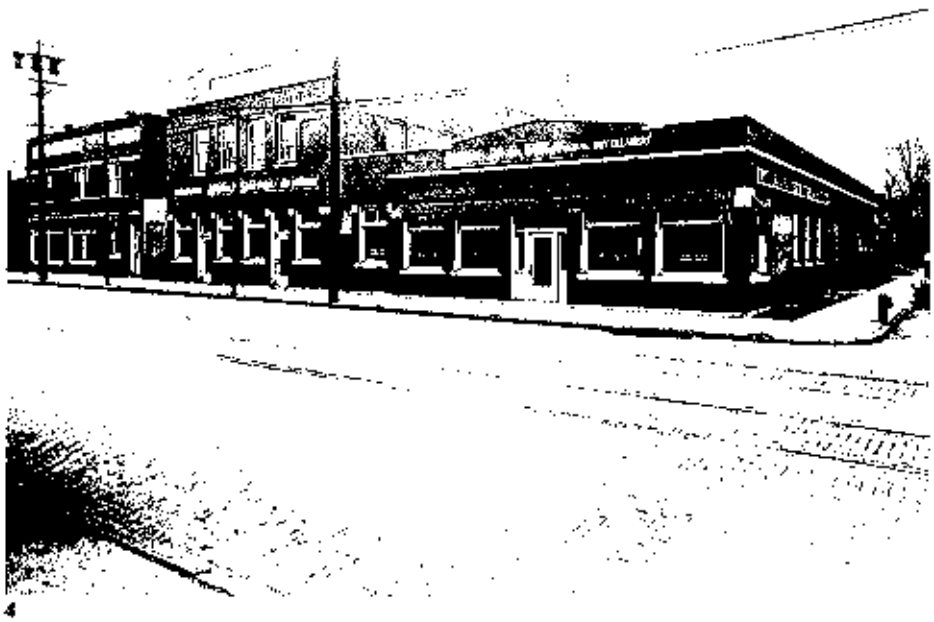
(Nebraska Blue Book)

4. Edholm-Sherman Laundry, 2401-11 North 24th Street, 1929

A laundry and dry cleaning establishment on North 24th Street from the 1920's until the 1940's, Edholm-Sherman was on the Omaha *Guide's* "honor role" for hiring black employees and supporting the newspaper through ads.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)

5. The Hawkins Block, 2120 North 24th Street, 1984

Built in 1924 by Dr. Anthony L. Hawkins, the structure indicated the establishment of the black community on North 24th Street.
(Omaha City Planning Department)



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came well known later as the homes of the *Star* newspaper and as Metoyer's Bar-B-Q, respectively.[17]

The food business, in various forms, provided another opportunity for entrepreneurs. Since restaurants were always segregated, they provided a ready market for businessmen and a number of these enterprises appeared in this area. Two that lasted were James Bell's Midway Cafe at 2418 North 24th and Rabe's Buffet at 2425 North 24th. At the same time there were a number of black grocers led by the Carey Brothers. A.J. and J.C. Carey operated five grocery stores in Omaha and Kansas City by 1930. Among their stores were the Carey Neighborhood Grocery at 27th and Grant which handled over $100,000 of business annually, stores at 27th and Ohio, 2120 North 24th and two in Kansas City. The *Omaha Guide* said the Carey Brothers were "in a class by themselves in the retail grocery business in the State of Nebraska when it comes to our group." The newspaper urged community support for the Careys since the more business they received, "the more work for our girls and boys." Earlier that year a group of 15 owners and managers of grocery stores had formed the Colored Merchants Retail Association and named A.J. Carey president.[18]

The growing number of black professionals also located near 24th and Lake, or on 24th Street. Among them were physicians Wesley Jones and Herbert Wiggins at 1518½ North 24th, Dr. G.B. Lennox at 1602, Dr. A.L. Hawkins at 2120 in the Hawkins Block, and dentists J.A. and C.H. Singleton at 2411 and 2502½ North 24th Street. Dentist Craig Morris shared an office with Dr. J.H. Hutten at 2419½ North 24th Street, while at 2420 were physicians A.A. Foster, Price Terrell and A.M. McMillan. Dr. D.W. Gooden had offices at 2211½ Cuming, while Dr. W.W. Solomon was the City Physician and later located at 24th and Wirt. By 1936, dentists John J. Jones and W.W. Peebles also practiced on North 24th Street.[19]

A number of attorneys also had offices in the black community. Along with long time attorney Harrison Pinkett were William B. Bryant, Ray Williams, Jesse Hutten and Ralph Adams. Others included John Pegg, a former Inspector of Weights and Measures; Arthur B. McCaw, who went on to become an economic advisor with the U.S. State Department; and John Adams, Sr., and John Adams, Jr., both of whom



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1. Miniature Golf, 24th and Grant Streets, 1930's
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)
2. *Omaha Star* Building, 2216 North 24th Street, 1984
Since its founding by Mildred Brown in 1938, the *Omaha Star* has served as the voice of the black community.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

served in the state legislature. One other attorney in this era was Charles Davis, whose daughter, Elizabeth Davis Pittman, also became an attorney and a municipal court judge.[20]

In *Black Chicago,* Allen Spear pointed out that the migration of the Teens gave a push to developing black businesses, by providing them with a greater number of potential customers. In Chicago, whites controlled most businesses in black neighborhoods, but blacks competed successfully in operating restaurants or in the businesses of hairdressing, real estate and undertaking. While no extensive study of the mix of black and white business on North 24th Street has been undertaken, Spear's conclusions appear generally to reflect the Omaha situation as well.[21]

Among the most successful of Omaha entrepreneurs were hairdressers. One of the oldest institutions was the California School of Beauty Culture at 521 North 33rd Street, founded by Mrs. Kathryn Wilson. In the late 1930's the school was described as "one of the best schools of this character in Nebraska," and one which compared "favorably with the best of them everywhere." Mrs. Wilson, a former teacher, wrote a textbook entitled *The Successful Hairdresser,* which went through six editions. She also controlled at least one branch operation, the Katherine Beauty School in St. Louis.[22]

Another beauty school operator was Mrs. Christine Althouse, owner and founder of the Althouse School of Beauty Culture at 2422 North 22nd Street. She was a graduate of Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri, and had previously been a teacher. Mrs. Althouse wrote weekly articles on beauty culture for *The Guide.* Her school later moved to 24th and Corby and even later to 24th and Pratt.[23]

The black community was well served with newspapers through the years between the wars. John Albert Williams' *Monitor* continued until 1929, and was supplemented by the *New Era,* published from 1920 to 1926 by George W. Parker. *The Omaha Chronicle,* published by John B. Horton appeared in the 1930's. One of the longest-lived of all black newspapers was the *Omaha Guide,* established by B.V. and C.C. Galloway in 1927. C.C. Galloway had been involved in a variety of businesses since the turn of the century. In 1909 he operated the Humboldt Bar and Cafe at 1419 Dodge and a hotel at 1421 Dodge. Unfortunately, his hotel did not survive, but Galloway soon appeared in business again, operating a billiard parlor downtown, and even later, a real estate office on North 24th Street. *The Guide* was known for its "first class modern printing plant" and a circulation of over 25,000 in the mid-1930's. One author cited Galloway's business achievement and called him a "remarkable personality who possesses business acumen rarely enjoyed by a man of any race." *The Guide* was published until 1958.[24]

In July, 1938, two former staff members of *The Guide* launched the *Omaha Star,* a new weekly which outlasted all other black newspapers in the city. Founded by Mildred Brown, former *Guide* advertising manager, the *Star* was eventually located in the former mortuary at 2216 North 24th, still the newspaper's home today. A native of Birmingham, Alabama, Brown had excelled at raising money for churches and charity groups. She utilized her abilities to sell ads for the *Star,* of which she became the publisher.[25] Under Mrs. Brown, the *Star* has continued as an important voice in the community.

Employment Between the Wars

While the business community on North 24th Street was prospering, the majority of black residents found employment elsewhere. An analysis of census data in 1920 and 1930 reveals that most blacks were confined to relatively few job groups. In both years the bulk of men were employed in manufacturing and mechanical industries and domestic and personal service, the category which also provided jobs to virtually every employed woman as well. The preponderance of men in manufacturing and

3. Interior of a meat packing plant, ca. 1928
The meat packing industry became a major employer of blacks in Omaha, particularly after integrated unions grew stronger in the 1930's
(Louis R. Bostwick Photo, Courtesy of Nebraska State Historical Society)

4. Omaha Urban League Banquet, 1932
The Urban League began as a social-oriented agency in 1928, but started to focus primarily on civil rights by the post-World War II era.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)



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mechanical pursuits was particularly related to the meat packing industries. The packing companies were among the businesses that recruited in the South, offering jobs and free transportation to blacks who would work for them. As a result the 1910 census total of 12 men employed in packinghouses had jumped to almost 1,000 by 1920 and about 900 ten years later. The domestic and personal service jobs for men were usually as porters, janitors and waiters, while women were frequently servants or laundresses.[26]

James Harvey Kerns, executive secretary of the Omaha Urban League in 1932, analyzed black employment in business and industry and found some significant problems. Certainly the worst problems were the intolerant attitudes of white employers and workers who were reluctant to accept black employees. As a result, apprenticeship positions were scarce and greater demand for fewer positions kept wages low. The study also pointed to inadequate education which failed to supply students with the training needed for employment. Union membership did not appeal to blacks initially, primarily because they had derived little benefit from unions and had often been excluded. Some unions, such as barbers and musicians had segregated locals, while others, such as packinghouse unions that formed in the late 1930's, were integrated.[27]

Thus, while blacks were moving into a number of occupations, their progress was limited because of white attitudes and inadequate education. If a black man could not accumulate enough capital to operate his own business, few other opportunities to work his way up were easily attainable. The best students frequently went on to become professionals, since those services were in demand.

Community Life

The impact of the Great Migration was felt in all aspects of black community life. It brought more students for schools, a proliferation of churches, and increased pressure for the few recreational facilities available. The greater numbers swelled the membership of organizations but also provided greater numbers in need. Just as a variety of social and civic clubs formed in the period before World War I, new groups arose in the inter-war period. Foremost among them were two organizations dedicated to advancement of the race: the NAACP and the Urban League.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was an interracial group formed in New York City in 1910. Their program included "the abolition of all forced segregation, equal education for Negro and white children, the complete enfranchisement of the Negro, and the enforcement of the 14th and 15th amendments." An Omaha chapter was formed in 1914 under the guidance of Reverend John Albert Williams and Harrison J. Pinkett. Membership numbered over one thousand at that time, a total credited to the effort of C.C. Galloway, who was first vice-president of the group and head of the membership campaign. The organization fought discrimination in the courts, employment and in public accommodations, ever striving to protect the civil liberties of blacks.[28]

While the NAACP was involved in a variety of court fights dealing with civil liberties, another national organization was formed to assist Southern migrants in adjusting to urban life and to help them find jobs. The National League on Urban Conditions among Negroes, shortened to the National Urban League, was formed by a group of social service agencies in New York City in 1911. An Omaha branch was established in 1928 and concentrated on employment assistance. When the organization was able to use the former Webster Telephone Exchange building at 2213 Lake Street in the 1930's, it expanded programs and provided a small library, gym, little theater, and activity room for various handicraft classes. The Omaha League eventually pulled away from its community center focus by the end of the 1940's and concentrated on the provision of greater job

1. The Beau Brummell Club, ca. 1935

The Beau Brummell Club was one of the prominent social groups in the 1930's. Members shown on this photo are: (front row, left to right) James Jewell, Vernon Blackwell, Virgil Shobe, Gerald McKinley,George Dean, Al Brewer (second row) William Davis, Lester Draper, Orville Webster, Ulysses Watson, Joe Strowder, James Calloway, Leonard Harold (third row) Ralph Taylor, William Roulac, Lewis White, Maurice Corbett, Roy West, James Smith.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)

2. Coronation Ball at Dreamland Hall, June 1933

Sponsored by St. Philip's Episcopal Church, the Coronation Ball honored an outstanding man and woman of the community. Chosen King and Queen Borealis in 1933 were W.I.

opportunities for blacks. The League also achieved gains in education and the integration of public facilities, transforming it into an agency for social justice rather than the community center it provided throughout the Depression.[29]

The North Side YWCA was created in 1920. A residence at 2306 North 22nd Street became the "Y" Community Center and offered classes, lectures, and space for club activities of all kinds. A garden club was organized to take care of the grounds and building, and after a few years, the group evolved into the Quack Club. This organization, composed of the "most active young colored women in the community," presented a yearly operetta and annual Christmas and summer dances held at Brownell Hall, social events which raised money for the "Y."[30]

While the civic organizations concentrated on community betterment, there were also a variety of fraternal and social clubs functioning. In 1926, the Masons had their club rooms in the Frenzer Block at 1902 North 24th Street, and later met at 26th and Blondo, while the Elks met at Columbia Hall, 2420 Lake Street. Founded in 1919, the Theodore Roosevelt Post of the American Legion was organized to help ex-servicemen adapt to civilian life and find employment. The group was also involved in relief and social welfare work, and organized an auxiliary for women relatives of members.[31]

Among the first social clubs in the black community was the Pleasant Hour Club, formed in the late nineteenth century. It was later followed by the Aloha Club, the Entre Nous Club, Trojan Club, Quack Club and Beau Brummels Club. Certainly the highlight of the social scene, however, was the annual Coronation Ball, with the announcement of King and Queen Borealis. Sponsored by St. Philip's Episcopal Church, the celebration was modeled after the Ak-Sar-Ben festivities and each year honored an outstanding man and woman of the community. The pageant, frequently held at Dreamland Hall, began in 1930.[32]

Despite the number of social and civic clubs, the central and most important institution for many residents was the church. As Spear pointed out in *Black Chicago*, religious activities were the aspect of family life most affected by the Great Migration of the Teens. The newcomers increased the number of churches and also preferred a different style of worship. The previously



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Myers and Madeline Shipman.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)

3. Salem Baptist Church, 22nd and Seward Streets, 1928

The Salem Baptist congregation worshipped at 22nd and Seward Streets from 1928 until the mid-1930's, when the structure was torn down for construction of the Logan Fontenelle Homes.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)

4. Pilgrim Baptist Church Daily Vacation Bible School, 25th and Hamilton Streets, 1931

Pilgrim Baptist Church was founded by a group that had migrated from the South in 1918. Two years later they purchased this building from the Calvary Baptist congregation and have remained at the location into the 1980's.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)

predominant Baptists and Methodists had a "decorous order of worship," while many of the new congregations reflected a rural Southern background which stressed an "informal, demonstrative, preacher-oriented" worship style. The new residents felt uncomfortable in the older churches and many opened storefront churches, which have since become an established aspect of black religious life.[33]

In 1933, the Baptists had the most members and 15 churches, including Zion, the oldest, and a number of smaller congregations. Zion remained at 23rd and Grant where it was rebuilt after the 1913 tornado. Salem Baptist and Pilgrim Baptist churches were of relatively new origin, founded after the influx of new residents during the Teens. Like many other congregations at that time, Salem met in a variety of places before purchasing a church building at 1811 North 23rd. This structure was outgrown by 1928 and the congregation moved to the former Clair Methodist Church at 22nd and Seward. Although it held 1,200 and suited the congregation the building was torn down for construction of the Logan Fontenelle Homes. In 1936, the congregation purchased a lot at 2741 Decatur and built a church that provided Salem with a home for 35 years.[34]

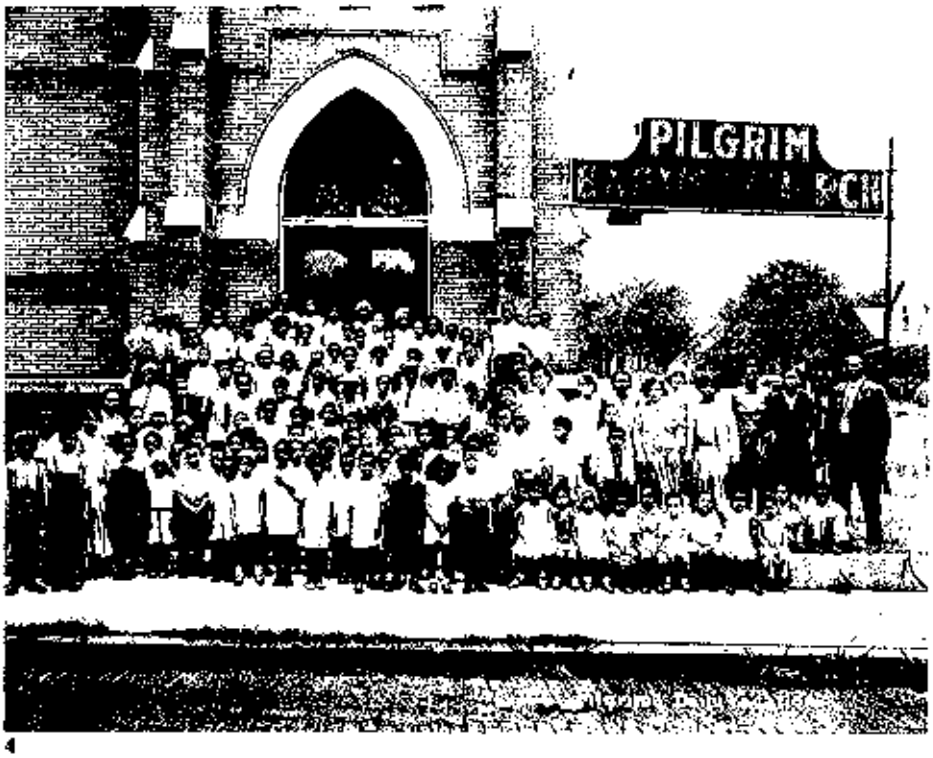
Pilgrim Baptist Church was founded in 1918 and also began meeting in a vacant storefront on North 24th Street, and later at 26th and Franklin. In 1920, Calvary Baptist at 2501 Hamilton, a white congregation, decided to move farther west, and agreed to sell its building to Pilgrim Baptist for $35,000. Pilgrim's congregation took over the church building in September, 1920.[35]

Among the other early Baptist churches was Mt. Moriah, which had begun downtown and moved to 2553 Seward by 1910. In 1925 they relocated again, moving into the former Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) building at 2602 North 24th Street. The Mt. Moriah congregation built a new church on the same site in 1934. Morning Star Baptist first met in 1928 at 2608 Franklin, a building that was originally built for St. John's Episcopal Church in 1887. Morning Star Baptist remained at that site until 1949, when it moved to the former St. Mark's Lutheran Church at 20th and Burdette.[36]

Among the largest and oldest churches in other denominations was St. John African



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1. St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church, 2402 North 22nd Street, 1978
The distinctive St. John A.M.E. Church is one of the few buildings in the city that reflect the flat, horizontal prairie style architecture derived from architect Frank Lloyd Wright.
(Omaha City Planning Department)
2. The Dan Desdunes Concert Band, 1919
In the 1920's, the Desdunes band served as



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Methodist Episcopal, founded in 1865. Their 1867 structure at 18th and Webster had been enlarged and remodeled in 1908. In 1921, St. John's bought three lots at 22nd and Willis for a new church and completed a brick foundation for the structure. The congregation met in the basement and built the sanctuary as funds became available. Finally in 1943, the congregation moved upstairs for worship services. The structure, designed by Frederick Stott and Reinholdt F. Hennig, was built in Frank Lloyd Wright's prairie style, with a flat roof and clean horizontal lines. Out of St. John grew three other AME churches in Omaha, Bethel AME at 25th and Franklin, Allen Chapel in South Omaha, and Primm Chapel, formerly at 18th and Emmet.[37]

Clair Methodist Episcopal Church first met in 1928 at 22nd and Miami. They had purchased the former First Church of the Brethren, built in 1915 by a congregation of German heritage. Clair remained there for 30 years until moving to the former St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church at 2443 Evans. St. Paul's had built this brick church after the 1913 tornado had wrecked their previous building at 28th and Parker.[38]

The only Catholic church serving blacks was St. Benedict the Moor, organized in 1921 by Father Francis Cassilly. Father Cassilly taught at Creighton University and saw a need to serve Omaha's black community. In 1923 Father Cassilly and his congregation took over a former brick factory at 2423 Grant as their church. The school of St. Benedict the Moor, operated by the Sisters of Mercy, was the only one in Omaha planned specifically for black children. It was also the only school in the city that allowed black education students at the University of Omaha to conduct practice teaching.[39]

Recreation and Entertainment Along North 24th Street

A good portion of the entertainment activity on North 24th centered around music and the music industry. That music consisted of jazz and blues, which one author called "cultural necessities" for black urban dwellers of the 1920's and 1930's. While Omaha was secondary to Kansas City as a jazz center in this region, the city supported more than one band of its own in the heyday of jazz. But music and bands had an early start in the black community, with both popular and classical musicians. Among the first groups was a band organized by Josiah Waddle in 1902. Waddle, the child of a slave family, came to Omaha in 1880 and became the city's first black barber. He organized a 15-piece band which furnished music for county fairs, chautauquas, and local musicals.[40]

In 1904, Dan Desdunes came to Omaha from New Orleans and took over leadership of the Knights of Pythias Uniform Rank Band. His showmanship, musicianship, and personality eventually popularized the group and it became the official Chamber of Commerce band in 1918 and led the annual Ak-Sar-Ben electric parades. They travelled all over Nebraska on the Chamber's annual Good Will Tours to promote Omaha. Desdunes led the band until his death in 1929. It reamined the Dan Desdunes Band, however, even under the leadership of George Bryant, who began conducting the group in 1935 and remained for a quarter century. Bryant, a friend of W.C. Handy, played with a variety of groups before taking over in Omaha.[41]

But North 24th Street was best known in Omaha as a center of jazz. James Jewell, Sr., built the Jewell Building at 24th and Grant in 1923. The second floor housed the Dreamland Ballroom, which became an entertainment center from the 1920's on and lasted longer than many other early clubs. Dreamland hosted all the big bands, including those of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, Earl Hines, Jimmy Lunceford, and Lionel Hampton. James Jewell, Jr., who managed Dreamland until it closed in the

Omaha's official Chamber of Commerce Band and represented the city on numerous occasions. (Douglas County Historical Society)

3. The Nat Towles Orchestra, 1940

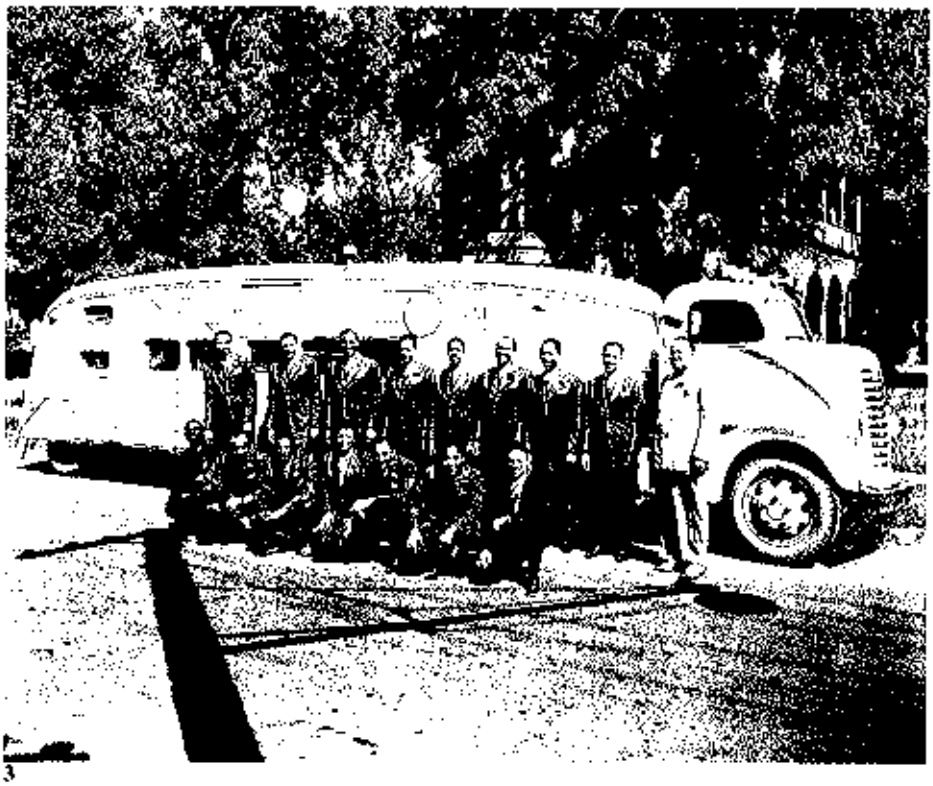
Operating out of Omaha, the Nat Towles Orchestra reached its height of popularity in the 1940's.

(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)

4. Dreamland Hall, 2221 North 24th Street

Operated by James Jewell, Jr., Dreamland Hall was a long-time club for big bands and jazz in Omaha, hosting such musicians as Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Nat King Cole.

(North Omaha Community Development, Inc.)



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1960's, booked the original Nat King Cole Trio for $25 per man. Integrated crowds listened to Duke Ellington for admission of only a dollar at Dreamland Hall.[42]

Other clubs and bands also added to the music picture on North 24th Street. Two bands, the Omaha Night Owls and the Sam Turner Orchestra, played the first jazz in Omaha at The Grotto, a club at 2025 North 24th in the early 1930's. The Night Owls later became the Dixie Ramblers, and rivaled Lloyd Hunter's Serenaders. In 1936, a Texas band led by Nat Towles played at Dreamland Ballroom and ended up staying in Omaha. They became the top band in the area and until 1950, the Towles orchestra was "one of the biggest businesses in the black community." Preston Love, an Omaha musician who played with Count Basie and other big bands of the era, wrote that the Towles orchestra "climbed higher in national recognition than any other band in Omaha history."[43] Other familiar bands in these years were Simon Harrold and the Melody Boys, the Jungle Rhythm Boys and Basie Givens and his orchestra. Later night clubs in the neighborhood included McGill's Blue Room at 2423-25 North 24th which opened in 1939, Allen's Showcase Lounge, located at 2229 Lake, and the Carnation Ballroom at 24th and Miami. The popular Carnation hosted musicians such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Fats Domino.[44]

As in the rest of the city, neighborhood theaters were entertainment centers on the North Side. Already present in 1912 were the Diamond (later the Lake) at 2410 Lake, the Franklin at 1624 North 24th, and the Alhambra at 1826 North 24th. Two decades later, at the height of movie popularity, there were a total of eight theaters on the North Side, including the Corby at 2803 North 16th, the Grand at 2920 North 16th, and the North Star at 2413 Ames. However, theaters were usually segregated so blacks most often patronized the Ritz at 2043 North 24th, which had opened in 1930.[45]

The Ritz also showed films made by early black filmmakers such as Oscar Micheaux and brothers Noble and George Johnson, who aimed at reaching a new urban audience of blacks. Noble Johnson was a contract player for Universal Studios in Los Angeles when he formed the Lincoln Motion Picture Company with other black investors in 1916. Among the first of black film enterprises, the Lincoln Company aimed to make pictures with a "black point of view" and produced three films by 1918. The first showing of a Lincoln picture outside California was in Omaha, in several neighborhood theaters owned by whites but which catered to black audiences.[46]

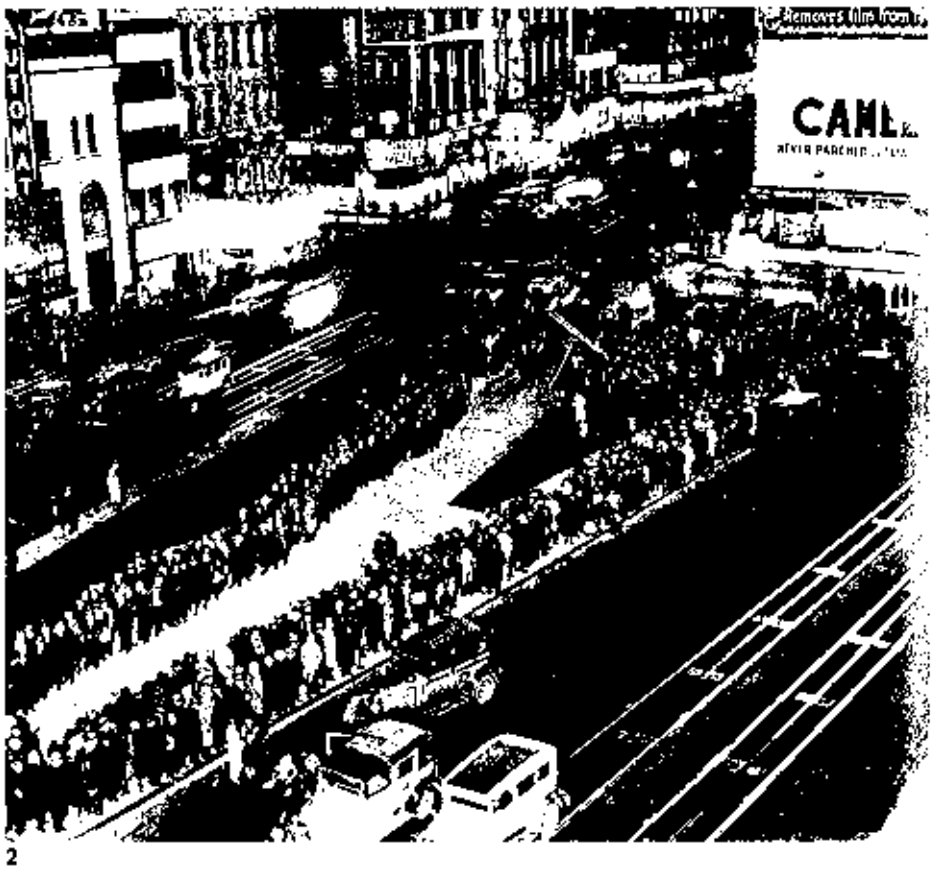
Noble Johnson resigned from the Lincoln Company in 1918, but his brother grew more involved. A postal worker in Omaha, George Johnson opened a general booking office for Lincoln films. From his residence at 2816 Pratt (where he boarded with Isaac Bailey in the house designed by Clarence Wigington) Johnson established a series of branch offices in major cities that became the first black-operated national film booking organization. Although he left Omaha by 1921, and the Lincoln Company was discontinued in 1923, George Johnson moved to Los Angeles and compiled an extensive collection of information on blacks in the movie industry.[47]

Oscar Micheaux was among the most successful of black independent film producers, making movies from 1918 into the mid-1940's, despite constant financing problems. George Johnson and the Lincoln Film Company had sought to produce a film called *The Homesteader* based on Micheaux's experiences in Dakota Territory. When the deal fell through, Micheaux decided to organize his own company. Micheaux's films dealt with controversial issues such as lynchings that few other filmmakers dared address. One of his first controversial films, *Within Our Gates*, was shown in Omaha in 1920.[48]

Although Omaha's black population was



1. Corby Theater, 2803 North 16th Street, 1948
Located along the North 16th streetcar line, the Corby was one of eight theaters in North Omaha in the 1930's.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)



2. The Depression in Times Square, New York City, 1932
Lines of people waiting for free coffee and sandwiches were a common sight in many cities

smaller than that of other cities, it obviously supported the newly expanding black film business, and witnessed some early developments within that industry. Neighborhood theaters in Omaha gradually declined and by 1936, only the Ritz remained on North 24th Street south of Lake. It stayed in business until 1968 when new suburban theaters gradually assumed the neighborhood cinema business.

Effects of the Depression

When the stock market crashed in 1929, it affected economic conditions throughout the country. In North Omaha, residents felt the Depression most keenly in two areas: employment and housing. Because many blacks were unskilled laborers, they were among the first laid off from their jobs. As more and more residents were unemployed, the 24th Street business district suffered as well. Nationwide, black unemployment percentages were far above those of whites and by 1935, one-sixth of those on relief were blacks — who made up only one-tenth of the total U.S. population.[49] Both President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal legislation and employment efforts by the Omaha Urban League helped ease the situation, but many residents were still without jobs.

The Depression brought one benefit to black laborers, however. The development of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the 1930's and its unionization of steel and auto workers, longshoremen, mine and packinghouse workers all brought benefits to blacks employed in those industries. The CIO was consistently opposed to racial discrimination, and membership in its unions gave blacks some leverage in the market place.[50]

In Omaha, job efforts within the black community centered around the Urban League's Colored Free Employment Bureau, located at 2010 North 24th in 1931. By the end of the decade, as the United States geared up for World War II, the League assisted workers caught between cutbacks of WPA funds and new defense industry jobs. Efforts centered around job training, integration of factories and offices previously closed to blacks and upgrading of black employees. The League particularly assisted in placing workers in a variety of new positions, with some 350 laborers hired to work on the Martin Bomber Plant construction project. Smaller but significant gains occurred with the hiring of black elevator operators at Northwestern Bell,

across the U.S. in the Depression.
(Wide World Photos)

3. Federal Emergency Relief Administration Orchestra, Morton Park, February 22, 1935
The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), a forerunner to the WPA, provided 120 hours of employment per month for musicians in the mid-1930's.
(Nebraska State Historical Society)

4. 24th and Ames Streetcar Barn, ca. 1945
By the 1940's, streetcars vied with automobiles as the means of transportation in the city. After World War II, widespread ownership of automobiles made it easier for Omahans to move out of close-in neighborhoods to new suburban residences.
(Douglas County Historical Society)

black women at Armour Packing Company and integration of the 24th Street Safeway grocery store staff.[50]

In the long run, however, the New Deal was most beneficial to blacks in the construction of new public housing. As historian John Hope Franklin stated, "these modern units, with electric or gas appliances and facilities for recreation, gave thousands of Negro families an opportunity to live in a kind of environment that previously was wholly unknown to them."[51] While public housing has come under considerable criticism in the last two decades, the original experiment did bring improved dwellings to both white and black inner city residents in the 1930's. Two housing projects were built in Omaha during the Depression: the South Side Terrace Homes, just south of the stockyards at 28th and "R" Streets and the Logan Fontenelle Homes, from 20th to 24th, Paul to Seward Streets, in North Omaha.

The first blacks moving into North Omaha followed the same paths as previous European immigrants, moving first into the southern sections of the vicinity and gradually northward or westward as their economic situation improved. However, this pattern held true only until the great increase in black population by the 1920's. While all other immigrants moved out as they achieved economic success, racism halted blacks with invisible walls that formed the ghetto. As a result, middle and upper class blacks were forced to remain in the neighborhood with its overcrowded, deteriorated housing. This physical confinement was an important factor in developing the strong community present in the 1920's and 1930's, but it limited blacks to residing in one of the oldest and increasingly decaying areas.

In a 1942 study, black residents of North Omaha rated the quality of housing available to them. The most deteriorated dwellings were around Kellom School, just north of Cuming Street. Housing rated as average filled an area where the majority of blacks lived, from Paul to Lake, 24th to 30th and 33rd, and Burdette to Maple east of 24th. Above average housing was located west of 27th Street, north of Lake to Spencer. East of 24th, blacks moved no farther north than Maple Street by World War II. This was due in part to Sacred Heart Church and the strong Catholic community around it which remained fairly stable until the 1940's and halted integration.[52]

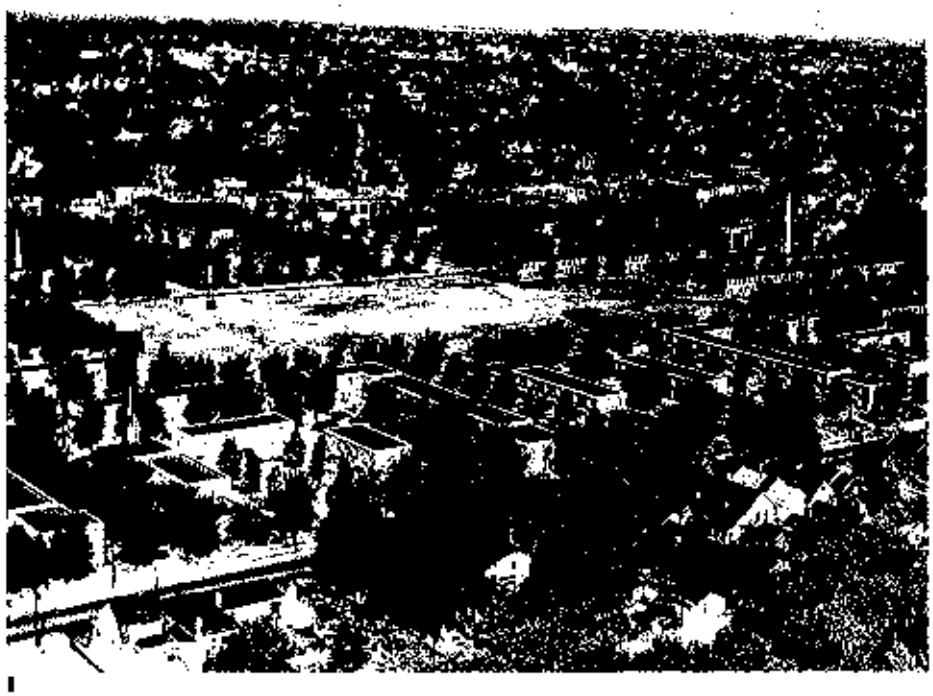


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t. Logan Fontenelle Homes, 1947
Public housing projects, such as the Logan Fontenelle Homes which opened in 1938, were initially viewed as positive efforts to provide good housing in older communities. In later decades, housing authorities began to build smaller, less concentrated projects or individual residences in scattered locations.
(John Savage Collection, Western Heritage Museum)



The area of deteriorated housing around Kellom School was eventually chosen for the first public housing project in the city. Named the Logan Fontenelle Homes in honor of an Omaha Indian chief, the $2 million project was given authorization to proceed in 1936 when the last residents on the site had moved out. Of the residents who left, 59 percent owned their homes, which were generally well maintained. However, the rental properties which comprised the other 40 percent were scattered throughout and in poor repair. Few rental buildings were painted and many had broken windows and sagging porches, while vacant lots contained weeds several feet high.[54]

Built with WPA labor, the Logan Fontenelle Homes opened in March, 1938. Each of the 284 units had a private entrance, bath and kitchen appliances. In addition, the complex had play areas for children nearby, and two recreation centers, each with a full-time director. The Homes were entirely paid for and owned by the federal government, but operated by the Omaha Housing Authority. Another 272 units were added to the Logan Fontenelle Homes in 1941.[55] The buildings were segregated from the beginning, with white residents living east of 22nd Street and black residents living on the west.

No doubt some construction of new public housing and neighborhood redevelopment would have continued, but World War II postponed any activity for several years. As the nation entered the war, the period of blacks' strict confinement into the Near North Side ghetto formed in the 1920's was ending. To be sure, clear boundaries remained for another two decades, but beginning in the 1950's blacks slowly began to move north and west from their earliest neighborhoods. The years after World War II also brought racial conflicts, both nonviolent and violent, which called attention to the problems in North Omaha. By the late 1940's the housing and neighborhoods developed in the nineteenth century were old and had undergone several waves of residents. Thus, the years after World War II witnessed efforts by blacks to improve their neighborhoods and also brought the start of city and federal attempts to redevelop the Near North Side.

The Post-World War II Era

The years from World War II until the 1980's brought the greatest period of conflict and change in North Omaha. Omaha expanded and more than doubled its prewar size, with new suburbs reaching to the west and especially the southwest along the interstate highway. Decentralization of residents, industries and shopping districts all helped extend the city over additional land.

All the growth and expansion left the older inner city behind, however. As industry and retail businesses moved out to the suburbs, the older neighborhoods were no longer so convenient. Some inner city residents moved out to the suburbs. Unfortunately, for black residents of North Omaha, segregation was still in force and the new suburban houses were not open to them. Until the 1960's, blacks who moved out of the Near North Side usually moved to other older neighborhoods in the inner city.

At the same time, the changing economic picture failed to benefit the black community. Jobs were increasingly located in other areas of the city, and employment mainstays such as the packinghouses eventually closed. Unskilled workers had fewer job opportunities as Omaha changed from a blue-collar laboring city to a white-collar financial, insurance and service center.

The City of Omaha began to survey the problems of older neighborhoods soon after World War II, but it took until the 1980's for local and federal efforts to bring significant results. Since 1945 North Omaha has faced the urban problems of aging housing stock with resulting deterioration and condemnations, disturbances in the 1960's and a freeway cutting through the community. It is a testament to the neighborhood's residents that a strong community has managed to survive and face the future with optimism.

Housing and Civil Rights

The years following World War II brought efforts by the City of Omaha to modernize and update not only its physical appearance, but to provide services and needs postponed through the Depression and war years. In an attempt to deal with a multitude of problems, Mayor Charles W. Leeman organized a City-Wide Planning Committee in 1945. Their *Improvement and Development Program*, released in March, 1946, was an assessment of existing conditions and recommendations for capital improvements. Among the chapters was one devoted to housing and slum area elimination.

The Housing Committee's recommendations included an urgent need to rehabilitate two blighted residential districts: the area east of the South Omaha stockyards



2. Whitney M. Young
Whitney Young, director of the Omaha Urban League from 1950 to 1953, was instrumental in ending segregation in Omaha's public housing. Young later became famous across the United States as executive director of the National Urban League.
(Chris McNair Studio, Birmingham, Alabama)

and a North Side district between 16th and 30th, Cuming to Bedford. Committee members and neighborhood residents had surveyed 2,490 houses in the North Omaha area and found that 375 deserved condemnation, 232 required major repairs and another 635 needed minor repairs. They further identified the causes of blight in the area, pointing out that most of the structures were quite old and lacked sufficient plumbing and other conveniences. In many cases houses were too close together because of small lots or because additional structures were erected on the same lot. Unscrupulous landlords received high rents for dilapidated buildings, since blacks could not easily move outside the area. Homeowners found it almost impossible to obtain mortgages or home improvement loans because lending agencies refused to commit funds in North Omaha.[1]

The Housing and Slum Area Elimination Committee not only identified the blighted areas but listed recommendations as well. They called for a program to get mortgage money into the area, a fund to assist owners of condemned property and plans to construct new homes in North Omaha. They also pointed out that the City needed to provide the usual municipal services, noting that it had failed to properly serve the area in the past. In a rather advanced view for the 1940's, the report called for infill development, the utilization of vacant lots for new construction. Since these lots already had gas, sewer and water service they would be economical to use rather than encouraging "the further spreading of the City beyond the City limits." Despite the analysis, however, the Committee felt the work could be accomplished with "little, if any, public funds."[2] They apparently believed the City could identify problems, but that other agencies such as lending institutions or the neighborhoods themselves should alleviate the problems. The Committee reflected prevalent attitudes toward housing rehabilitation in the 1940's. Public housing was still a new concept, and the provision of loans and grants for rehabilitation of individual houses by public agencies was not yet a part of national housing programs. As a result, the Mayor's City-Wide Planning Committee proposed 16 bond issues, but none dealing with housing and slum elimination.

Along with problems of blight in older neighborhoods, Omaha was also suffering from a severe housing shortage. Returning veterans had difficulty finding homes and the Omaha Housing Authority set up temporary barracks-like dwellings in several parks to relieve the situation. The OHA also moved forward with plans for three new public housing projects, all in North Omaha.

By late 1950 OHA advertised for bids on the Hilltop and Spencer Homes. Hilltop Homes, located between North 30th and 33rd Streets, Grant to Lake Streets, contained 225 units and opened in late 1951. Spencer Homes were completed in 1952 and contained 175 units on either side of Spencer Street from North 26th Avenue to 29th Street. These one- and two-story units reflected the unimaginative design of public housing construction in the 1950's, with residents housed in plain rectangular buildings with little ornament. All three sites were mostly vacant when chosen for OHA housing. Farther south were the 300-unit Pleasantview Homes, located on either side of North 30th Street between Parker and Burdette. This complex contained two six-story buildings, originally planned for families but later converted to residences for senior citizens, and a number of low-rise structures. Pleasantview Homes opened for occupancy in fall, 1953.[3]

Even before the Hilltop Homes had opened, the North Omaha Commercial Club publicized its opposition to any additional public housing in North Omaha, fearing an overload on schools and other nearby facilities. The OHA Board responded with its belief that any efforts to remove blight on the Near North Side would benefit the area. In addition OHA had attempted to locate its housing on sites that would not have been fully developed otherwise because of topography or location. Certainly the topography of both the Pleasantview and Hilltop Homes sites had prevented much development there in previous years.[4]

This era finally brought the end of one public housing problem — segregation. Both the Logan Fontenelle and South Side Terrace Homes had been segregated from the beginning. At the urging of black leaders, the OHA Board voted to end segregation in all its homes in November, 1951. The decision was an important victory for the Urban League and its new Executive Secretary, Whitney M. Young, who had pushed for the change. Young had come to Omaha in 1950 to direct the Urban League.



1. Post-World War II Construction, 30th and Parker Streets, 1984
Built by the Wilson Real Estate Company in the late 1940's, these houses represented the first new single family dwellings on the North Side since the 1920's.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

2. St. Benedict School and Church, 2423 Grant Street, 1984
St. Benedict was founded as a segregated black parish in the 1920's, but received regular parish boundaries when the Archdiocese ended segregation in the late 1940's.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

3. Carver Savings and Loan Building, 2414 Lake Street, 1984
Carver Savings and Loan Association was founded in 1944 by black Omahans and named

He encouraged local involvement and was especially effective in opening up new positions for blacks in firms such as Northwestern Bell, Union Pacific Railroad, Metropolitan Utilities District and Omaha Public Power District. Young left Nebraska in 1953, but later went on to become executive director of the National Urban League.[5]

Other private housing appeared on the Near North Side in the late 1940's. One development was located on the grounds of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary on Florence Boulevard between Spencer and Emmet. After the seminary closed in 1942, its classroom building was converted to apartments. The land east of the structure was utilized for the new Garden Apartments, constructed by the Carl C. Wilson Real Estate Company. Containing 100 units of two-, three- and four-room apartments, the two-story brick buildings were built with a federally insured loan and completed by 1950. The apartments attracted business development into the area with the conversion of an old garage at Florence Boulevard and Emmet into the Garden Market, a grocery store which continued to remain in operation for over two decades. The Wilson Real Estate Company also constructed one-story ranch style houses at 30th and Parker, while the Realty Improvement Company built houses at 30th and Wirt. While not large-scale projects, these homes were the first new single family dwellings on the North Side since the 1920's.[6]

While the single family homes on Parker and Wirt were open to black purchasers, the Garden Apartments stood in the middle of Kountze Place, a neighborhood which had resisted any integration and had effectively stopped all blacks from moving north of Maple Street before World War II. In the summer of 1946 residents of Kountze Place and other subdivisions took steps to legally enforce segregation. Property owners signed restrictive covenants stipulating that they or their agents would not sell their properties to "any person or persons of any race other than those of the Caucasian race, nor shall any other person or persons other than those of the Caucasian race use or occupy any building or any lot hereinafter described." The covenants were binding for 25 years, and provided the landowners with power to prosecute and recover charges from anyone who violated the agreement. Although the U.S. Supreme Court ruled restrictive covenants unconstitutional in 1948, the feelings that engendered such documents created psychological barriers that made it difficult for blacks to move into white neighborhoods. Practices limiting rental, sales and financing agreements, as well as covenants were common across the United States and also inhibited black mobility.[7]

By the 1950's some families had moved north of Maple Street and west of 30th Street, the old boundaries of the ghetto. Census tracts 7, 8 and 9, which covered the land north of Maple to Ames, were over 50 percent black for the first time in 1960. At the same time, whites still predominated in neighborhoods just west of 30th Street, but blacks comprised 35 percent of residents in Tract 52 and 16 percent of Tract 53, which included the area from Charles to Bedford Streets. Efforts to integrate previously white neighborhoods were supported by a growing civil rights consciousness which emanated from a Creighton University student group called the De Porres Club. When a black veteran received threats after purchasing a home on North 31st Street in 1950, De Porres Club members and their leader, Father John Markoe, helped the family move in and get established in the neighborhood without violence.[8]

The De Porres Club was organized in November, 1947, when a group of Creighton students met for the purpose of promoting civil rights for blacks. Under the leadership of Father Markoe, the group pioneered some of the non-violent techniques that were used during the civil rights activities in the 1960's. Through picketing, sit-ins and boycotts, the club achieved important successes, particularly in black employment. The club was never an official Creighton organization, but it soon attracted members from all walks of life and all races.[9]

The club members saw a need to work for the rights of blacks who resided in the neighborhood just north of the campus and established a center at 1914 North 24th Street. They sponsored lectures, held children's programs, distributed food and clothing to the needy and assisted the unemployed in finding jobs until October, 1950, when a lack of money forced them to close. However, Mildred Brown, publisher of the *Omaha Star* and a faithful supporter of the group's activities, offered the use of her newspaper offices at 2216 North 24th. The *Star* eventually provided the bulk of publicity on the De Porres Club, since their activities were seldom noted by other city newspapers.[10]

Among the first battles undertaken by the group was segregation in the Catholic Church. St. Benedict's Church, established in the 1920's at 24th and Grant, had no parish boundaries but was expected to serve all blacks throughout the city. As blacks began to move northward, they entered the boundaries of Sacred Heart parish and wanted to join the church and attend the parish school. After steady urging by the De Porres Club, Sacred Heart opened its doors, and two black girls entered Sacred Heart High School in fall, 1948. The work of the De Porres Club led to the creation of a new St. Benedict's parish and prompted Archbishop Gerald T. Bergan to publicly state that segregation would not be tolerated in the Omaha Archdiocese.[11]

The club next attacked discrimination in public recreation, amusements and eating places. In an effort to receive service in restaurants, club members pioneered the sit-in technique later widely used in fighting racial discrimination. Several restaurant owners were taken to court for violating state laws forbidding such discrimination, and the club usually won.[12]

The most extensive of the De Porres Club's efforts were its campaigns to secure fair hiring practices among Omaha employers. With no state fair employment law, job discrimination kept blacks unemployed or underemployed. Through the Club's efforts, blacks were hired at the Coca-Cola plant at 3200 North 30th, and by the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company.[13]

The De Porres Club entered a period of declining activity after 1954, as the activist

in honor of scientist George Washington Carver. The Lake Street office opened in 1946. (Omaha City Planning Department)

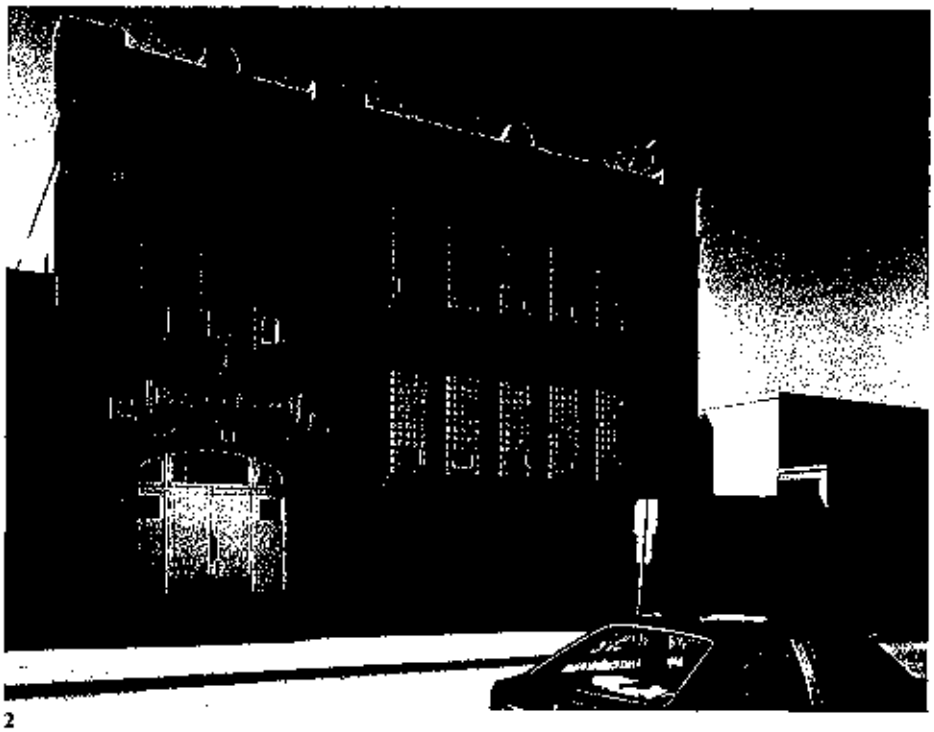
students graduated or moved away. The Club fought one more significant battle in 1959 when it sought to end segregation of black teachers in the Omaha Public Schools. At that time OPS had no black high school teachers and 36 black elementary school teachers were concentrated into the schools on the Near North Side. New leaders emerged in this battle, with recent law school graduate, Wilbur Phillips, and Reverend Emmett T. Streeter, of Clair Methodist Church, organizing the campaign. Again they picketed and passed out leaflets, but were stymied for several years. Their objectives were achieved, however, when a new superintendent took control in 1962, and gradually hired additional black teachers and moved them throughout the system.[14]

New Construction in North Omaha

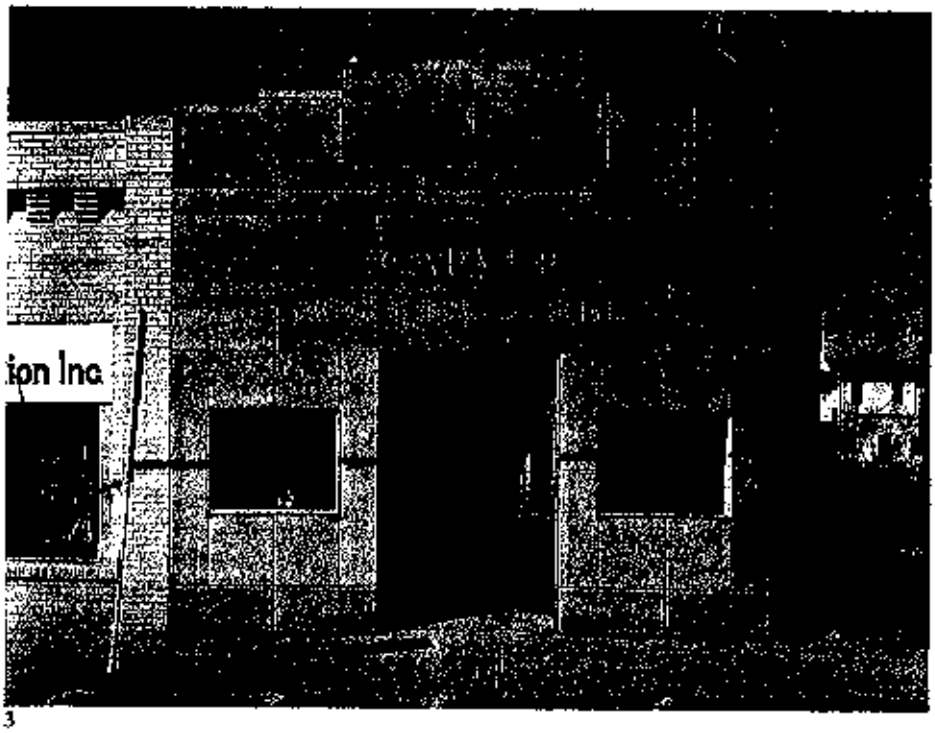
Although public housing dominated residential construction in North Omaha, a number of new public facilities were also built. A group of community leaders received a charter from the state banking department in late 1944 to form the Carver Savings and Loan Association. Named in memory of scientist George Washington Carver, the association had a capital stock of $50,000. By mid-1946 the organization had opened its own building at 2414 Lake Street. President of the Board of Directors was druggist Milton Johnson, with attorney Charles Davis serving as secretary-treasurer.[15]

As the housing stock in North Omaha had aged, so had its educational structures. Kellom and Lake Schools had been built in 1888; Long and Lothrop in the early 1890's. The Kellom area, previously chosen for the Logan Fontenelle Homes because of its housing deterioration, also became the focus for the new school building. By 1948 the Kellom School Recreation Project had begun to acquire the necessary property between 20th and 24th, Nicholas to Paul Streets. The new Kellom School opened in late 1952, and was followed by a City-run Kellom Community Center several months later. Located in the school building, the community center utilized the school gymnasium and outdoor playground and swimming pool. When opened, the facility was the largest of City-operated community centers.[16]

Although Kellom was the first to be replaced, the other North Omaha schools were eventually changed, too. Howard Kennedy School, built in 1910 at 30th and



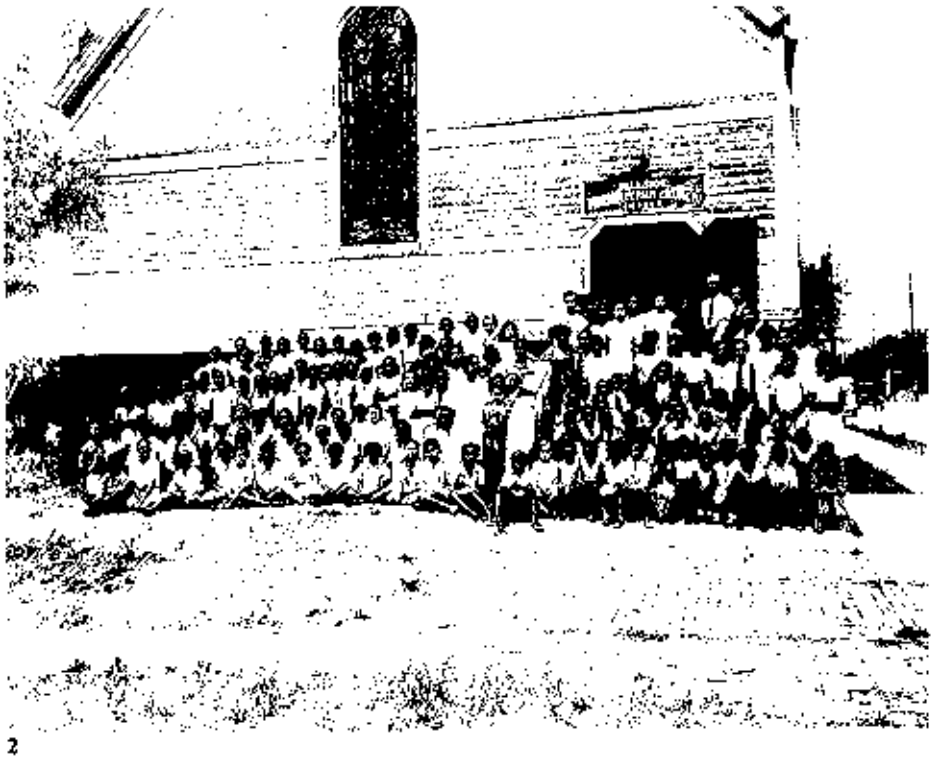
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1. Lothrop School, 3424 North 22nd Street, 1910
Lothrop School, built in 1892, was replaced by a modern new facility in 1967.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)
2. Hillside Presbyterian Church, 30th and Ohio Streets, July 28, 1931
The Hillside Presbyterian congregation worshipped at 30th and Ohio from 1926 until con-

Maple, received a new addition in 1957. A new junior high, Horace Mann, appeared at Florence Boulevard and Pratt in 1960. Conestoga School, opened in 1965 at 22nd and Burdette, took over many of the Lake School students, as did a new Lothrop School which opened in 1967. By the 1970's both Lake and Long Schools were abandoned as their students were absorbed into other facilities. Long School was razed, while Lake School was sold for use as a parochial school.[17]

Social service agencies entered a building era as well. The YWCA, which had existed in a house at 22nd and Grant since 1920, purchased the former Hillside Presbyterian Church at 2710 North 28th Avenue in fall, 1954. Known as the Tubman Center, the new YWCA served young women in North Omaha for another twenty years. The YMCA constructed a new building in the early 1950's at 2311 North 22nd. It was followed, a decade later, by the construction of the new Gene Eppley Boys' Club at 2200 North 20th Street. The Eppley Foundation, set up by hotel magnate Eugene C. Eppley, provided over $400,000 for the new building. It was located on a city playground which had been the site of the Ak-Sar-Ben den until it burned in 1927. Completed in spring, 1963, the Boys' Club housed a swimming pool and gym and provided an outdoor track and athletic field.[18]

One other long-time North Omaha facility was the North Christ Child Center, established at 1814 North 18th to serve as a settlement house among the Italian colony in that area. By the 1950's the neighborhood that it existed to serve had gradually become more industrial as families moved out, and the agency wanted to move from its deteriorated building. After an analysis of the Sacred Heart-Lothrop School neighborhood, which was undergoing rapid change in transition from predominantly white to black through the 1950's, the agency purchased land at 2111 Emmet where they built a new Christ Child Center.[19]

The new Kellom School and playground required additional land surrounding the former school, and forced at least two religious congregations to relocate. For the members of B'nai Jacob Anshe Shalom, located at 24th and Nicholas, the relocation was rather straightforward: they simply moved their entire building to 3028 Cuming Street. The congregation of St. Philip's Episcopal Church faced a more difficult di-

structing a new church at 28th and Miami in 1950. They later merged with another congregation to form Calvin Memorial Presbyterian and took over their current building at 24th and Wirt Streets.
(Bostwick-Frohardt Collection)

3. The Historic March on Washington, D.C., 1963

The August, 1963, March on Washington attracted national attention to the fight for civil rights.
(Maurice Sorrell, Ebony)



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lemma. Although their property at 1119 North 21st Street was appraised at over $38,000, the City Parks and Recreation Commission could only afford to pay half the appraisal value. The church graciously consented to accept the reduced amount and eventually purchased another lot at 2532 Binney where they erected a new brick structure in 1949.[20]

Other growing North Omaha churches erected new buildings on the same site. Pilgrim Baptist Church was gutted in a 1948 fire, but with the brick walls and tower left standing, the congregation rebuilt and returned to a substantially new structure in 1951. St. Benedict's Catholic Church, which had been housed in an old 1890's brick factory building, erected a new church at 2423 Grant in 1958.[21] In general, however, most black churches moved into church buildings left behind by white congregations that had moved out and constructed new buildings elsewhere.

When Pella Evangelical Lutheran, a congregation of Danish heritage, decided to move farther west in 1945, the church building at 30th and Corby was sold to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. It became Hope Lutheran Church and served a black congregation. Trinity Methodist Episcopal at 2029 Binney decided to move farther north in the mid-1950's, and their building soon became the Church of the Living God. Plymouth Congregational Church, built in 1915 at 1802 Emmet Street, was sold to Primm Chapel AME Church in 1961.[22]

North Presbyterian Church had been built in 1910 at 24th and Wirt. By the early 1950's, as the area around it was experiencing racial transition, the white congregation moved and left the large structure vacant. The Presbytery was determined to keep the building for its denomination, and to that end, merged Hillside Presbyterian, a black congregation, with Bethany Church, a Presbyterian congregation of German heritage. Hillside had been founded in the 1920's and worshipped in a variety of dwellings before finally building their own church at 28th and Miami in 1950. Although the new merged church, named Calvin Memorial Presbyterian, was intended to be integrated, the few white members who had come from Bethany Church soon drifted away and Calvin continued as a black congregation.[23]

Housing and Civil Rights

Despite the construction of new public facilities, one of the worst problems of the Near North Side, housing, had still not been addressed. The next big planning effort was the 1957 Omaha Plan, another community-wide study. The committee examined neighborhoods in need of rehabilitation and once again, included much of North Omaha from Cuming to Bedford, 16th to 30th. They also called for completing the necessary steps to render Omaha eligible for federal funding through urban renewal monies.[24] When the public voted on bond issues to fund portions of the Omaha Plan, including urban renewal, the entire package was defeated in May, 1958.

Initially the black community supported urban renewal. The *Omaha Star* and the Urban League backed the Omaha Plan, although George Robinson, executive secretary of the Urban League in this period, had pointed out the problems of limited housing opportunities for blacks. In 1958, he provided figures showing that of over 13,000 new homes built in Omaha between 1952 and 1957, only 32 were available to blacks. Two dozen new subdivisions had been developed around Omaha in the previous decade, but none were open to black homebuyers.[25] Thus, while black leaders publicly supported the Omaha Plan, they had some misgivings about whether it would have negative effects on the black community.

By 1961, when City leaders and Chamber of Commerce representatives were lobbying the legislature on urban renewal, the black community was more clearly divided. Dr. A. B. Pittman, the first black president of the Omaha Urban League, supported urban renewal as a means to alleviate the poor housing conditions present in North Omaha. State Senator John Adams, Sr., who had represented North Omaha since 1949 and continued to do so until his death in 1962, denounced the bill, calling it the "most contemptible that has ever been entered into the legislature." Although Adams had been a co-sponsor of Nebraska's first slum clearance legislation in 1951, he increasingly viewed urban renewal as a means of usurping the rights and property of black residents. Other speakers representing the black community asked for guarantees providing open housing for those displaced by urban renewal projects.[26]

As the United States entered the decade of the 1960's, black Americans were gaining a new national consciousness in the effort to achieve racial equality. With inspiration provided by the 1954 school desegregation Supreme Court decision, the Montgomery bus boycott of 1956 and resulting leadership of Martin Luther King, and the civil rights bills of 1957 and 1960, blacks across the country organized civil rights demonstrations calling for "job opportunities and an end to *de facto* segregation in housing and education." The culmination of this effort was the August, 1963, march on Washington in which over 200,000 persons converged on the capital to demonstrate their commitment to civil rights. This giant gathering made clear the national significance of the civil rights struggle and probably helped ensure the passage of the first comprehensive civil rights act in 1964.[27]

Among the national black leaders who emerged in the early 1960's was Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little in Omaha, in 1925. Malcolm's father, Earley Little, was a Baptist minister and supporter of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, a group which instilled racial pride and urged black Americans to return to their African homeland. Ku Klux Klan members threatened the family and the Littles left their Omaha home at 3448 Pinkney soon after Malcolm's birth. After a difficult life that included drug addiction, hustling and a prison sentence, Malcolm reformed and converted to the Islamic religion. He first changed his name to Malcolm X in honor



1. Malcolm X
Born Malcolm Little at 3448 Pinkney Street in Omaha, Malcolm X helped establish an awareness of black culture in the United States. Omahans have recently established a foundation to develop the birthsite of Malcolm X as an historic site.
(Ebony Collection)

of his unknown African tribal name and became a primary spokesman of the Nation of Islam. Under his later Muslim name, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, he led the battle for black unity, pride and self determination. Although an assassin's bullet cut short his life in 1965, Malcolm X helped establish an awareness of black culture and power in the 1960's.[28]

These national events did not go unnoticed in Omaha, where efforts by blacks to achieve fair housing took the forefront. A new group, the Citizen's Coordinating Committee for Civil Liberties, or the 4CL, marched on the City Council in October, 1963, to urge the passage of an open housing ordinance. Led by the Reverends Rudolph McNair and Kelsey Jones, the demonstrators carried signs denouncing racial discrimination and sang in the council chambers. In accordance with the non-violent techniques of the civil rights movement, the protesters offered little resistance when arrested by the police. The following week some two thousand blacks joined in a silent protest at the council chambers which ended without any arrests.[29]

By the mid-1960's, the local press, particularly the *Sun* newspapers, focused on housing discrimination. An investigative article in the *Dundee and West Omaha Sun* in January, 1964, revealed that North Omaha landlords could recover their investment in dilapidated buildings every three or four years. The housing market for blacks was so constricted that even run-down dwellings were profitable for landlords. In addition, blacks could expect to pay 50 percent to 100 percent more for any unit of housing on the Near North Side than would a white person in any other part of the city. In many cases, single family dwellings had been converted to multi-family units, with a resulting overload on plumbing, heating and electrical systems. Because many of the properties had a relatively low value, the landlord could readily purchase a dwelling, make as few repairs as possible and quickly recoup his investment in a few years.[30]

Housing discrimination was not limited to those with lower incomes unable to leave the Near North Side. The *Sun* later printed the story of a black professional couple and their attempts to purchase a new suburban home. When racist reactions by realtors and prospective sellers stymied their efforts, they decided to build a new residence by proxy. In exchange for a $500 fee, a white couple purchased a lot in North Central Omaha, built the house and deeded it to the black couple. Although the developer of the subdivision in which the new home stood offered to trade the couple several lots in West Omaha in exchange for their home, they chose to stay.[31] Clearly, Omaha needed an open occupancy law in the mid-1960's.

At this time, the City of Omaha had few institutionalized procedures to deal with discrimination in any form. A Human Relations Board was created under the 1956 charter to advise the Mayor and City Council on administration and enforcement of laws relating to discrimination, but received no staff until 1964. Two years later, Human Relations became a City department with the function of eliminating and preventing "all forms of discrimination because of race, religion, national origin or ancestry and to insure equal opportunity for all citizens of the city." Finally, in 1969, an open housing ordinance was passed in Omaha after passage of a similar law in the legislature. It was followed by a fair employment practices ordinance two years later.[32]

The Failure of Rising Expectations

Despite the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the hope it engendered for equality, the following years saw resistance to its enforcement as well as racial violence. Indeed, 1964 brought the first of the national urban disturbances that peaked in 1968. Advances had been made through civil rights legislation and creation of human relations agencies, but blacks still faced discrimination in housing, education, and employment. The push for equality made it appear as though the economic gap between blacks and whites had narrowed, yet statistics revealed that such differences had actually increased. In 1963, the national black unemployment rate was 114 percent higher than that of whites. While black opportunities seemed to be getting better, in fact, they were getting worse. As this became apparent to blacks concentrated in the poorest urban ghettos, frustration and alienation escalated into violence.[33]

The rage and anger that exploded other urban ghettos in 1964 and 1965 manifested itself in Omaha, with disturbances in the summer of 1966, in March, 1968, and again in 1969. In each case a confrontation between police and black teenagers precipitated the disturbances. The 1966 troubles began with skirmishes between black teenagers and police at the Safeway parking lot at 24th and Lake Street. Hailed as a private urban renewal project when it opened in November 1964, the new grocery store and adjacent drugstore were among the only new retail outlets in North Omaha in almost two decades. A good portion of the land was devoted to the parking lot along Lake and all of the east side of 24th between Lake and Ohio Streets. In disturbances in July and again in August, rioters looted and burned several stores, smashed windows and threw bottles along 24th Street. Yet, Omaha was fortunate in that there were few injuries and no deaths throughout the disturbances.[34]

Although efforts were made to improve the situation by setting up various social programs, providing some job opportunities for black teenagers, and organizing two North Omaha recreational centers, the fundamental problems remained. In March, 1968, when controversial George Wallace appeared at the City Auditorium, a melee broke out between police and demonstrators. The disorder continued along North 24th Street, where several motorists were attacked and a pawn shop looted. Later that evening a 16-year-old black youth was killed in the pawn shop by an off-duty policeman guarding the premises. The death caused demonstrations and window break-

2. John Adams, Sr.
Nebraska Unicameral, 1949-1962
(Nebraska Blue Book)
3. Ernie Chambers
Nebraska Unicameral, 1970 to present
(Nebraska Educational Television Network)

ing by students at Horace Mann Junior High and Technical, Central and North High Schools, bringing the anger and frustration out of North Omaha and into the community.[35]

The most violent and destructive disturbances erupted in late June, 1969, after 14-year-old Vivian Strong was slain by a policeman at the Logan Fontenelle Homes. Several nights of violence followed with at least five buildings burned in the two blocks between Seward and Clark Streets. The policeman was tried for manslaughter in the death of Vivian Strong, and acquitted in March, 1970.[36]

Many younger, more militant black leaders blamed police brutality for escalating disturbances on the Near North Side. Clearly there had been shooting deaths connected with the 1968 and 1969 disturbances, as well as more general complaints about day to day police-community problems. The situation continued to fester until August, 1970, when policeman Larry Minard was killed as he answered a call at a vacant house at 2867 Ohio Street. Two young activists, David Rice and Edward Poindexter, were convicted on first degree murder charges and sentenced to life imprisonment in the state penitentiary. Rice and Poindexter had organized the National Committee to Combat Fascism, a militant organization that had grown out of the local chapter of Black Panthers. The conviction of Rice and Poindexter has remained controversial throughout the past decade, with considerable debate over their imprisonment. Appeals in their behalf have gone to the U.S. Supreme Court, which upheld the original decision in the case.[37]

The disorders of the 1960's brought out new leaders in the black community. Black state senators had represented the fifth (later the eleventh) district since John Adams, Sr., had been elected in 1949. Adams, the father of 1930's legislator John Adams, Jr., was also an attorney and stayed in the legislature until 1962. He was succeeded by Edward R. Danner, a former packinghouse worker and union official who served until his death in 1970. George W. Althouse, operator of the Althouse School of Beauty, was appointed to fill the remainder of Danner's term. He was defeated in his attempt to win election in November, 1970, by a young activist, Ernie Chambers. Educated at Creighton University Law School, Chambers worked as a barber and had become involved in public affairs during the late 1960's. He has strongly opposed the North Freeway and the death penalty in the legislature, and has been a leader in protecting the legal rights of blacks. He led the effort to change the method of Omaha City Council elections from at-large to district voting, resulting in the election of Fred Conley as the City's first black council member in 1981. Ernie Chambers has continued to serve in the legislature in the 1980's, providing an important voice for the Near North Side in the Unicameral.[38]


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Population and Housing Loss

The 1970's became a decade of paradox for North Omaha, with both decline and rebirth. The decline was significant, since the disturbances of previous years hastened deterioration and robbed 24th Street of its commercial vitality. The North Freeway, planned for the right-of-way between 27th and 28th Streets since the late 1950's, finally progressed to the point of acquisition of houses in its path. The extent of deterioration in North Omaha was best indicated by statistics. In the twenty years between 1960 and 1980, the population fell from almost 30,000 to 10,900. The decay and removal of housing stock dropped the total number of housing units from 8,900 in 1960 to 7,400 a decade later. A much deeper drop, caused by condemnations and removal of dwellings for the North Freeway, put total housing units at only 4,900 in 1980.[39] The loss of housing left much of North Omaha vacant, forcing the area's residents to find homes elsewhere.

The North Freeway has remained controversial and caused bitter debate in recent years. It was completed to Lake Street in 1976 and the path cleared of dwellings from that point to north of Ames Avenue. Opponents of the construction charged that the route was planned to divide the black community, and suggest that housing or other uses fill the vacant land in the Freeway path. Other Omahans have supported continued construction of the road since the land has already been cleared. Proponents believe the Freeway will spur economic development in the area and provide better connections to the rest of the city for North Omahans.[40]

While the Freeway has caused great social dislocation, it is clear that not all of the population loss was due to relocation from the road's path. The invisible walls of the ghetto that once constricted the area have weakened considerably. The 1980 Census revealed that blacks now reside in almost every census tract in the city. In general, the bulk of movement has been northwest through North Central Omaha and into the northwest portions of the city.[41]



1. North Freeway, View North from Hamilton Street, 1984

The North Freeway, planned since the 1950's and completed to Lake Street in 1976, is currently being extended to Ames Avenue. The Freeway has remained controversial, with opponents pointing to its division of the black community and proponents predicting it will spur economic development in the area.



2. Franklin Community Federal Credit Union, 1723 North 33rd Street, 1984

The Franklin Credit Union grew out of the self-help activities begun by the United Methodist Community Center in the late 1960's. Franklin makes loans to low income residents of the surrounding area, and has grown to over $1 million in deposits since 1968.



(Omaha City Planning Department)

Early Planning Efforts

While housing and commercial deterioration was accelerating through the 1960's and 1970's, the City was relatively slow to implement community development programs. In 1966, the City contracted with the office of Henningson, Durham and Richardson to produce a Community Renewal Program (CRP) for inner city neighborhoods. Under the CRP, the federal government paid two-thirds of the cost of planning a comprehensive physical development program for such neighborhoods. These plans, in turn, were a prerequisite for federal urban renewal funding for specific redevelopment projects.

Omaha's Community Renewal Program proposed revitalization and redevelopment in several North Omaha neighborhoods, including Kellom Heights. The CRP called for land acquisition and new multi-family development in Kellom Heights; acquisition with new single family construction in the Conestoga area; and rehabilitation with new infill housing development north of Lake Street.[42] Implementation of the CRP required the creation of an urban renewal authority with the power to acquire land and finance development. Under Nebraska state law, the creation of such an authority required approval by Omaha voters. This ballot issue was defeated three times during the 1960's with the final defeat coming in 1970. Although an urban renewal authority would have concentrated much of its attention on North Omaha, neighborhood residents generally opposed urban renewal. This opposition stemmed from the experience of other parts of the country where urban renewal often meant removal of low income and minority populations, clearance of existing buildings and replacement by higher cost housing or commercial development.

As a result, the City did not develop a coordinated approach to neighborhood revitalization. Scattered projects were started without great success. The Strehlow Apartments (Terrace Gardens) were partially rehabilitated with a federal loan, but the project went into foreclosure and the buildings were sold by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Omaha participated in a Federally Adjusted Code Enforcement Program (FACE) known locally as Operation Pride. The program did not operate in the traditional North Side and was terminated without major success. Omaha submitted an application in 1968 to designate North Omaha a Model Cities area. However, this application, which proposed a traditional urban renewal approach to the neighborhood, was not approved. Finally, City government worked with some neighborhood groups, notably the Kellom Community Council, on small area plans. Some projects such as the Kellom Greenway resulted from these efforts. However, neither the City nor the neighborhoods had the money to implement these plans.

Economic Advancement

The civil disorders of the 1960's demonstrated the need for local action to help revitalize North Omaha. In the face of substantial housing and business losses, community groups organized for future development. The United Methodist Community Center was a catalyst in the creation of the black owned Community Bank of Nebraska; the Omaha Economic Development Corporation (OEDC); and the Community Equity Corporation (CEC), an investment corporation with the ability to help finance minority owned small businesses. The Center also helped create the Franklin Community Federal Credit Union in 1968. Located in a former grocery store at 1723 North 33rd Street, the credit union increased to over $1 million in deposits in a decade. It has also started the Consumer Services Organization to provide loan counseling and workshops on finance. A group called Reconciliation, Inc., purchased KOWH-AM and KOWH-FM radio stations in 1970. The stations concentrated on soul music and features for the black community. Although the stations were sold in 1979, black businessmen purchased KBWH-FM in Blair, Nebraska, in 1983. Once again, a black owned station will serve Omaha residents.[43]

In 1972, North Omaha Community Development, Inc. (NOCD) was created and retained Eddie Chambers as director to prepare and implement a needs assessment plan. However, funding for NOCD's staff and operation ran out and the group was dormant until reorganized in 1975.[44] A study commissioned by the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce in 1972-73 pointed to a need for a private non-profit community development corporation to invest in necessary but risky development projects in inner city neighborhoods. This study resulted in the creation of the Greater Omaha Corporation in 1974, capitalized by corporate contributions.

Another effort in this era was the Opportunities Industrialization Program, organized to provide job training for the disadvantaged. Although the program began in Philadelphia, it was brought to Omaha in 1967 by Reverend Foster Goodlett, minister of the Mount Moriah Baptist Church. Operating with federal funds, the Opportunities Industrialization Center was opened in a remodeled garage and warehouse at 2802 North 24th Street. Classes included clerical work, keypunching, welding, drafting, machine tool operations and other fields. The programs grew enough to require additional space and in 1976 groundbreaking occurred for a new 30,000-square-foot OIC building. Designed by Golden Zenon, the new single level structure and parking lot were built at 24th and Corby.[45]

The 1970's also brought new construc-

(Omaha City Planning Department)

3. North Omaha Community Development, Inc. 1502 North 24th Street, 1984

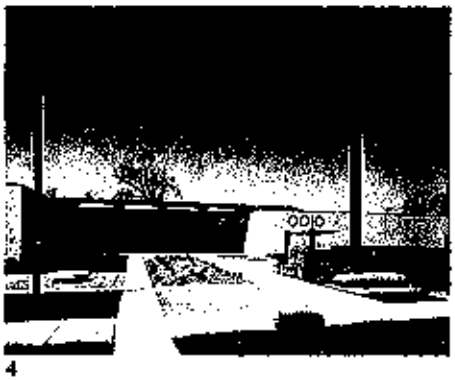
N.O.C.D. has grown from a community organizing agency to the developer of major projects such as the Horizon Townhomes and the Blue Lion Center.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

4. Omaha Opportunities Industrialization Center, 2724 North 24th Street, 1984

The Opportunities Industrialization Program provides job training to unemployed and underemployed persons who want to upgrade their skills. Omaha's OIC was first established in 1966, with their new building begun in 1976.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

5. North Branch Library, 28th Avenue and Ames, 1984

Designed by Golden Zenon, the North Branch Library is one of the public buildings constructed in North Omaha in recent years.
(Omaha City Planning Department)



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tion in both commercial and residential buildings. A long-felt need for recreational services in North Omaha received some relief with the Adams Park Community Center. Located on a high point in Adams Park at 3230 John Creighton Boulevard, the center was designed by Ambrose Jackson and opened in 1976. The intersection of 30th and Ames also attracted new commercial construction, including the North Branch Library, designed by Zenon, and the Thomas Plaza Office Building, designed by Jackson. Realtor and insurance salesman George Thomas constructed the building in 1976 for his business and to provide additional office space in the area.

New residential units came in the form of duplexes and townhomes built by the Omaha Housing Authority. In a move away from the large concentrated units that previously marked public housing, OHA began a trend of dispersal. New duplexes and townhouses were built on vacant lots throughout North Omaha and the rest of the city. These "scattered site" housing units provided additional public housing, but in a fashion more amenable to neighboring areas than the concentrated, dense complexes."[6]

At the same time, the existing complexes were modernized and the number of units reduced. A multi-service center, constructed adjacent to Kellom School and the Logan Fontenelle Homes, provided space for service organization offices and a branch of the Omaha Public Library. Sports and picnic facilities were added on land south of the Hilltop Homes. The planned North Freeway path will split the Spencer Homes, eliminating over fifty dwelling units. OHA made an agreement with the Nebraska Department of Roads to replace the dwellings with new buildings in the same vicinity. Remaining buildings will be rehabilitated. In addition, the Martin Luther King Center at 27th and Wirt, a child care and recreational facility, will be replaced by a new center northwest of 30th and Bedford."[7]

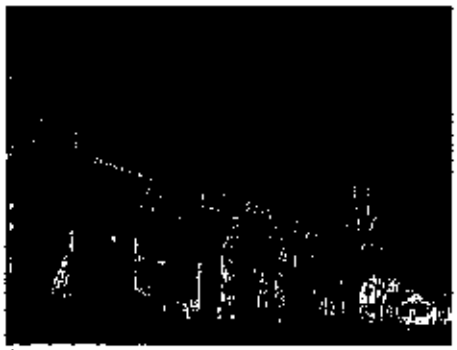
Neighborhood Revitalization

The missing ingredient in many of these early revitalization efforts was major public funding for neighborhood development and an agency able to plan and carry out projects. Federal, state and local legislation in 1974 and 1975 filled this gap. Congress passed the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. This act created the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, which combined categorical federal urban development programs into one large pool of money. CDBG funds were distributed to all cities with over 50,000 people according to a formula rather than competitive applications. For the first time, Omaha had a major source of funds to finance neighborhood development projects. In 1971, the Nebraska Unicameral adopted the State Community Development Law. This law defined community development as a public use for the purpose of land acquisition and permitted city councils in Nebraska to create community development agencies to carry out redevelopment and rehabilitation projects. On January 1, 1974, the Omaha City Council created the Housing and Community Development Department (HCD) and employed it as the City's community development agency."[8]

Omaha's new community development program experienced growing pains, particularly in its relationships with the North Omaha community. The City set up a structure of citizen participation, dividing the part of Omaha east of 42nd Street into seven sectors. Each sector had an advisory council which recommended project funding to a citywide advisory council. This organization then made funding recommendations to the City administration. A revised North Omaha Community Development, Inc. served as North Omaha's advisory council.

Unfortunately, the advisory structure did not work well. Too often it replaced a true neighborhood-city partnership with organizational structure. This tended to create a gulf between neighborhood organizations like NOCD and the new Housing and Community Development Department. Secondly, in spite of the extensive neighborhood participation structure, the City was spending the majority of its CDBG funds on land acquisition and public improvement projects rather than neighborhood development activities. This led to charges that the City was using North Omaha's poverty and housing statistics to receive federal funds, but was not returning the benefits of the program to North Omahans.

Gradually, City government focused more attention on North Omaha. In 1977, the City launched two major redevelopment efforts, both of which were included in the old Community Renewal Program of 1966. The first project in the Kellom Heights neighborhood originally proposed a "new town in town" on a hillside north of Cuming Street and west of 24th Street. Further planning and feasibility studies were performed during Omaha's riverfront planning program of the early 1970's. The United Methodist Community Center (Wesley House) took on sponsorship of this ambitious project. The City acquired a site bounded by Cuming and Hamilton Streets, 25th Avenue and the North Freeway, for the first phase of this project between 1977 and 1979. In 1979, the Omaha Economic Development Corporation was designated developer of the project. However, the land remained vacant until 1982, when a complex partnership of the Omaha Economic Development Corporation, the City, private investors and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development assem-



1. Kellom Knoll Apartments, 25th Avenue and Cuming Streets, 1984

First proposed as part of the Community Renewal Program in the 1960's, the Kellom Knoll Apartments are one of the most positive signs that North Omaha is on the road to revitalization. Later phases of the Kellom Heights Redevelopment Project will include commercial development at 24th and Cuming and additional housing units.

(Omaha City Planning Department)



2. The Horizon Townhomes, Spencer Street and Florence Boulevard, 1984

The FHA-financed Garden Apartments of the 1950's have been transformed into 50 owner-occupied townhomes that are another measure of revitalization success in North Omaha. The Horizon Townhomes, completed in 1982, were re-

bled financing, and construction on the 132-unit apartment project began. Completion is scheduled for late summer, 1983. Kellom Heights is the largest privately owned housing development in the history of North Omaha.[49]

A second redevelopment undertaking occurred in the Conestoga area. A plan developed with the Conestoga Homeowner's Association called for acquisition of property south of Conestoga School for a new single family residential subdivision. Land for this proposed development was purchased between 1978 and 1981. However, the property is still undeveloped and remains a major challenge for both the City and the neighborhood.

While the redevelopment projects involved major expenditures of money and effort in North Omaha, they had a limited effect on improving the state of existing neighborhoods. North Omaha Community Development, Inc. (NOCD) was becoming increasingly active in this regard. NOCD was successfully organizing local neighborhoods, emerging by 1979 as a federation of fourteen neighborhood organizations. A major priority of these neighborhoods was increased funding for housing rehabilitation. The City responded to these demands by working closely with neighborhood groups on plans and increasing annual expenditures on rehabilitation in North Omaha by over five times. In 1980, the City embarked upon a policy of concentrating funds in small target areas designed to produce visible, comprehensive improvements in strategic parts of North Omaha. In 1982, it was able to make low interest home improvement financing available throughout North Omaha as well, by combining CDBG funds with private financing.[50]

As rehabilitation activity accelerated, both NOCD and the City saw the need for a dramatic new project to change perceptions of North Omaha and to provide additional investment. This took shape as the redevelopment of the Garden Apartments. The Garden Apartments, built as an FHA-insured rental project in 1950, was vacated in 1976 and went into foreclosure in 1977. In 1981, a partnership of NOCD, the nonprofit Greater Omaha Corporation and the City began the rehabilitation of these buildings into the Horizon Townhomes. Private financing of $1,000,000 was raised through loans by a consortium of local lending institutions. The project was completed in 1982, providing 50 townhouses for homeowners. The project has been a substantial success and converted a neighborhood liability into a major asset. In addition, it demonstrated that a market for owner occupied housing indeed existed in North Omaha.[51]

As local groups gained greater expertise in project development, they considered commercial as well as residential development projects. The loss of businesses and neighborhood services during the 1960's and 1970's was keenly felt in North Omaha. In addition, the deteriorated state of North 24th Street created a poor image of the entire community. In 1978, the Omaha City Council allocated funds for the revitalization of North 24th Street. This started a planning process involving area businesses, neighborhood organizations and the City. These groups soon agreed to concentrate on the 24th and Lake area for both locational and historic reasons. After three years of planning, feasibility studies and design, construction was started on the Blue Lion Center at 2417-2423 North 24th Street in 1982. The project involved the adaptive reuse of the former McGill's Blue Room nightclub and the Lion Products building, formerly a farm machinery factory. This project, developed by NOCD, Inc. and financed with CDBG funds, will provide 15,000 square feet of retail and office space at the intersection.[52] Further public improvements, commercial rehabilitation loans and the restoration of the historic Jewell Building by the Omaha Economic Development Corporation will also take place in 1983.

These initial developments were carried out either by the City or by community-

habilitated through a financing package that included a consortium of local lenders, the non-profit Greater Omaha Corporation and the City of Omaha.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

3. **The Blue Lion Center, 24th and Lake Streets, 1984**

Developed by N.O.C.D., Inc., the Blue Lion Center has provided badly needed commercial space at the heart of North Omaha's historic business district.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

4. **Great Plains Black Museum, 2213 Lake Street, 1980**

The Great Plains Black Museum has become the central repository for historical materials relating to the black experience in Nebraska. Founded by Mrs. Bertha Calloway in 1976, the Museum is located in the former Webster Telephone Exchange Building which is a Landmark of the City of Omaha and on the National Register of Historic Places.
(Omaha City Planning Department)



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based non-profit organizations. However, North Omaha, as of 1983, is beginning to attract other investments as well. In 1981, Boys Town broke ground on a new $7 million high school for the Boys Town Urban Program. This facility, located on a six-square-block site bounded by Hamilton, Franklin, 25th Street and the North Freeway, replaces the former Dominican High School and will be complete by the fall of 1983. Metro Area Transit opened a new $20 million administrative and maintenance facility for its bus fleet at 23rd and Cuming Streets. Other private development groups are in the process of assembling major commercial and residential projects.

Neighborhood revitalization in North Omaha has also remained grounded in history, largely through the efforts of local groups and individuals. This effort has resulted in a basis for preservation and historic awareness programs in North Omaha. Coupled with an increasing focus on history and culture within the black community, preservation has become another tool for neighborhood revitalization. A number of structures within the North Omaha area, identified with both the black community and the nineteenth century immigrants that preceded it, have been designated as local landmarks or listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Central to this cultural awareness is the Great Plains Black Museum at 2213 Lake Street. Located in the historic Webster Telephone Exchange Building, which later housed the Urban League, the Museum was founded in 1976 by Bertha Calloway. Beginning with her personal collection of artifacts and documents, Mrs. Calloway has developed the Museum as a repository of materials documenting the history of blacks in Omaha and the Midwest. The birthsite of Malcolm X at 3448 Pinkney has also been designated a local landmark site by the City of Omaha. Led by Mrs. Rowena Moore, community residents have established a foundation to develop this site. Other designated local landmarks in North Omaha include St. John A.M.E. Church at 22nd Street and Willis Avenue; the Jewell Building at 24th and Grant Streets; Sacred Heart Church at 22nd and Binney Streets; the Trans-Mississippi Exposition Site bounded by Pinkney, Pratt, 24th and 16th Streets; and residences at 1802 Wirt, 1804 North 30th Street, 1924 Binney and 2024 Binney.[33]

The late 1970's and early 1980's have focused attention on the revitalization of North Omaha. The City has demonstrated an increasing commitment to its rebirth; local development corporations have become sophisticated in project development and self-sustaining private investment is beginning to occur. However, these trends are just beginning to reverse many more years of disinterest. Much work must still be done. Further, the revitalization process raises other issues, which will be considered in other parts of this report. However, the neighborhood's great strength is residents who are committed to its improvement. These residents have invested both time and money toward the idea that North Omaha can grow toward greater health. Just as the decisions made by people one hundred years ago created the landscape of North Omaha, so will the decisions of current residents and businesses and the quality of the partnerships that they can create with both government and other private business determine North Omaha's landscape of the future.

1. 2220-22 Spencer Street, September 12, 1929
This two-family structure, built in 1888, exhibits details associated with the Eastlake style of architecture. Although altered, the building remains in use today.
(Nebraska State Historical Society)

III. A Guide to the Architecture of North Omaha



1

2. George Kelly House, 1924 Binney Street, 1983
The classical architecture of the 1898 Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition influenced design in the Kountze Place neighborhood after the turn of the century, as evidenced in this 1904 Neo-Classical Revival home.
(Omaha City Planning Department)



2

All buildings look the way they do for particular reasons. Decisions related to size, shape, materials and decoration all contribute to a structure's appearance, that is, its architectural style. This section is intended to provide a greater awareness of the architectural styles of North Omaha and the origin of those styles, and to serve as a guide when renovating structures within the study area.

The majority of buildings in North Omaha cannot be neatly sorted into the established categories of architectural style. In fact, most of them are non-stylistic, that is, they do not possess the characteristics associated with the work of a well known architect such as Frank Lloyd Wright, and they are not based on a particular school of architectural thought or period in history. Most structures in North Omaha were designed by local builders and architects to be primarily functional, practical buildings. They are vernacular architecture.

Little has been written about Midwestern vernacular architecture. It was clear in the early stages of this study, however, that an analysis of the vernacular architecture of North Omaha was important. In order to learn more about vernacular building in the study area, information from the Historic Omaha Building Survey (HOBS) was employed. Using survey photographs, structures were sorted into vernacular types based on form. Building permit information was then used to record the date of construction and the builder and architect, when known. Statistics were compiled to determine the percentage each type represented out of the entire survey, to graphically portray when each type was constructed, to generally locate where each type occurred within the study area and to note the percentage of architect-designed structures for each vernacular type.

The bulk of vernacular structures fell into three main groups: the Temple Form, the Cubic Form and Bungalows. The Temple Form house evolved out of the Greek Revival architecture of the 1860's and is reminiscent of the temples of ancient classical architecture in both general shape and orientation. Cubic Form houses were grouped together because of the common cube-like shape of their main volumes, excluding roofs. Six Bungalow types, with varying roof and porch configurations, were common enough to be noted. Although Bungalows can be considered either high style or vernacular architecture depending on the degree of embellishment, the majority of Bungalows in North Omaha are simple, vernacular houses.

A fourth residential vernacular type included in this study is a simplified version of high style Queen Anne architecture. As with Bungalows, examples of both high style and vernacular Queen Annes can be found. Commercial vernacular buildings are also discussed.

Due to the large amount of information available on high style architecture and the fact that relatively few examples of these styles exist in North Omaha, the discussion on high style building is not as detailed as that pertaining to vernacular architecture. Further information on architectural styles can be found in *American Architecture Since 1780* by Marcus Whiffen (M.I.T. Press) and *Identifying American Architecture* by John Blumenson (American Association for State and Local History).

The Historic Omaha Building Survey

The Historic Omaha Building Survey (HOBS) is an inventory system employed by the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission to organize and store information pertaining to historic structures in Omaha. It consists of data collected from both an in-the-field survey and from City and County records. The field survey involves a photographic record of each building along with an assessment of its present condition, environment and vulnerability to defacement or destruction. The Douglas County Real Property File defines the land parcel the structure encompasses and provides the necessary information for further research in County deed and mortgage records. The City of Omaha Building Permit Application File is used to supply the date, type and dimensions of construction for each building as well as its original use, owner, architect and builder.

Personnel from both the North Omaha Community Development, Inc. office and the City Planning Department gathered information on over 3200 structures in the North Omaha study area using the HOBS system. Survey data is available for use at the Omaha City Planning Department.

1. Worker's cottage, 1812 Florence Boulevard, 1982

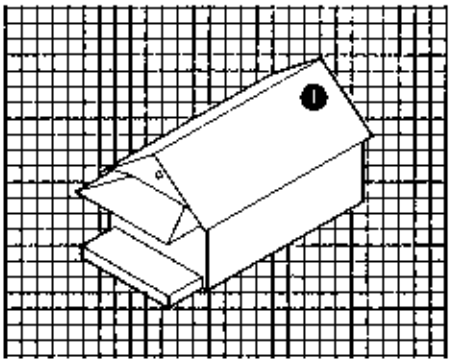
Dwellings such as these provided housing for blue collar workers in the mid-1880's. Their minimal ornament, influenced by the elaborate Queen Anne house of the same era, was usually limited to the front of the structure.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

Temple Form

Four walls enclosing a rectangular space and covered with a simple gable roof has been used for shelter since earliest history. Primitive thatched huts, medieval cottages, the houses of the American colonists and modern homes all share this universal form, which has practically become the symbol for a house. The Temple Form house has this same basic configuration but is distinguished from other simple gabled structures by its orientation: the entrance is in the gable end, which faces the street. In America the long side of the house was always predominant and faced the street until the Greek Revival Period of 1820-1865, when details similar to those found on idealized ancient Greek temples were being applied to all types of buildings with great enthusiasm. The Temple Form house developed when the gable end of the average American home was designed to resemble a temple pediment and the house was turned 90 degrees to display this pediment to the street.

Although the rage for the Greek Revival Style had passed several decades before North Omaha was developed, the basic street-facing gable form left by this style — with a one-story porch added across the front — became a popular and enduring house type. It is by far the most common vernacular type found in North Omaha, accounting for approximately 40 percent of all residential structures that presently exist there.

The Temple Form is extremely adaptable and can be found in sizes ranging from one to two-and-one-half stories, with many variations of detail reflecting the popular architectural trends of the day. While Temple Form houses of all sizes were built in North Omaha from the mid-1880's through the 1920's, the simplest one-story worker's cottage was the most common version constructed during the area's first major building period in the 1880's. Between the turn of the century and the first world war, when the second building boom period occurred, the majority of Temple Form houses tended to be larger and more elaborate, displaying more variations on the basic form through the increased use of bays, dormers, and minor changes in roof shape. One notable modification was the use of a gambrel roof to enlarge the upper floor of what was otherwise a standard one-and-a-half story Temple Form house.





1

Temple Form (Worker's cottage, one story)

Basic Form: Rectangular plan with depth greater than width; shallow pitched gable roof, gable end facing street; one story attached porch with shallow hipped roof across entire width of front.

Bays: Small bay window often occurs at one side.

Dormers: Dormers are not used.

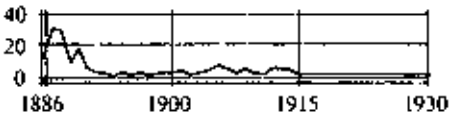
Windows: Tall, double-hung windows with two over two lights; small, decorative (diamond, circular or oval shape) window in gable end over porch.

Ornament: Decorative millwork (such as turned columns, spindles and fishscale shingles) is often used sparingly, concentrated on porch and street-facing gable end.

Location: Scattered throughout study area except in Kountze Place; good examples in area from Hamilton to Lake, 24th to 27th; also along 17th between Nicholas and Grace and on Bristol between 24th & 27th.

Percentage of this type in study area: 9.0%
Percentage of this type designed by architect: 4.0%

Characteristics
1. Gable roof
2. Gable end
3. Decorative diamond-shaped window
4. Ornamental millwork



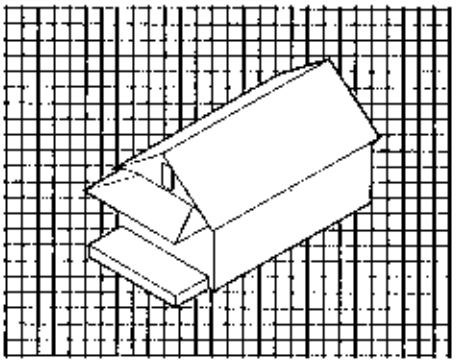
Number of Houses Built*

*Based on building permit information, when available. See appendix for composite chart of all vernacular types.

2. 2626 Decatur Street, 1984
The steep roof and second floor windows of this 1907 one-story temple form house reflect the use of the attic story for living space and distinguish it from the earlier worker's cottage.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

3. 2510 Corby Street, 1984
The basic temple form of the worker's cottage has been expanded to one-and-one-half stories in this vernacular house. Although one-and-one-half story temple form houses built as early as 1886 can be found in North Omaha, the vast majority occur between 1900 and 1915.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

Temple Form (One story with window*)



Basic Form: Same as worker's cottage except main roof is often steeper in pitch.

Bays: Same as worker's cottage.

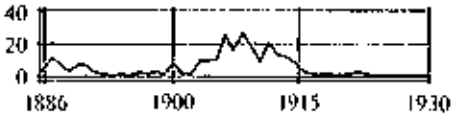
Dormers: Dormers are sometimes used.

Windows: *Decorative gable end window of worker's cottage is replaced with double-hung window(s) reflecting the use of the attic story for living space.

Ornament: Ornament tends to be simpler than on worker's cottage.

Location: Scattered throughout portion of study area west of 24th street; concentrations along 22nd and 23rd streets between Manderson and Sprague.

Percentage of this type in study area: 9.5%
Percentage of this type designed by architect: 5.5%



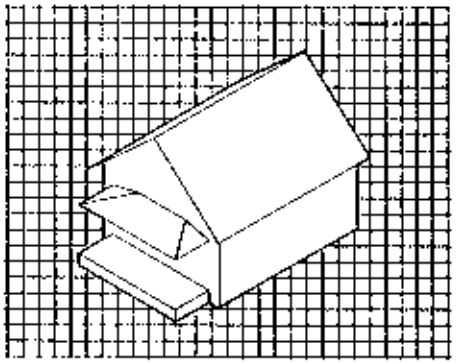
Number of Houses Built

Characteristics
1. Attic story used for living space
2. Double-hung windows
3. Hipped porch roof



2

Temple Form (1½ story)



Basic form: Same general massing as one story version, expanded to one-and-a-half stories.

Bays: Bays, on one or both sides, often extend through main roof to form wall dormer at second floor.

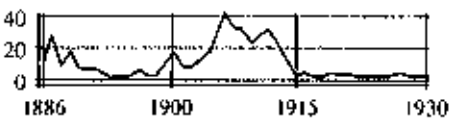
Dormers: Dormers are frequently used.

Windows: Double-hung windows with one over one lights most commonly used throughout; large double-hung window often used for living room; paired double-hung or Palladian type window in gable end.

Ornament: Earliest versions occasionally show minimal Queen Anne details, but usually not to the extent seen in the one story worker's cottage; subtle, classical detailing is common in the first decade of the twentieth century; after 1910, Craftsman details are often used.

Location: Common throughout the study area except in Kountze Place.

Percentage of this type in study area: 16.0%
Percentage of this type designed by architect: 5.5%



Number of Houses Built

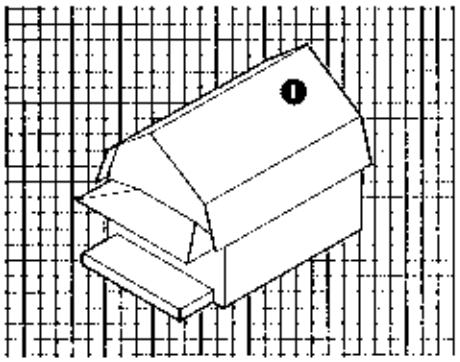
Characteristics
1. Dormer
2. Paired double-hung windows



3

1. 2407 Wirt Street, 1984
The gambrel roof, a distinguishing feature of Dutch Colonial Revival architecture popular after the turn of the century, is used to add interest to this 1906 one-and-one-half story vernacular house.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

2. 2424 Parker Street, 1984
Three second floor windows over three corresponding first floor openings is typical of this pre-1900 two-story temple form house.
(Omaha City Planning Department)





1

Temple Form (Gambrel roof variation)

Basic form: Essentially the same as one-and-a-half story version except for roof configuration.

Bays: Shallow bays occasionally used.

Dormers: Small shed dormers most frequently used.

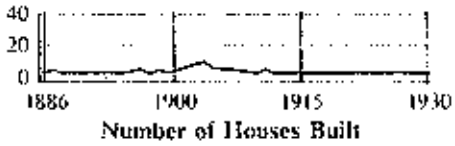
Windows: Double-hung windows with one over one lights most commonly used throughout; two windows often used in gable end.

Ornament: Minimal classical details occasionally used over windows or at porch; pediment occasionally used on porch coinciding with main entrance; decorative, classical window sometimes occurs in upper portion of gable end.

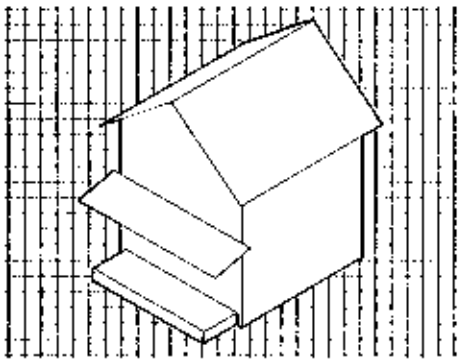
Location: Scattered throughout study area; majority found in area north of Maple and west of 24th; four on Ames between 25th and 26th, three on Spencer between 24th and 25th.

Percentage of this type in study area: 1.5%
Percentage of this type designed by architect: 20.0%

Characteristics
1. Gambrel roof
2. Dormers
3. Classical porch columns
4. Classical molding over windows



Number of Houses Built





2

Temple Form (2-2½ story)

Basic form: Examples built between 1886 and 1893 have same general form as one and one-and-a-half story versions, expanded to two to two-and-a-half stories; examples built after 1910 often have shallow roof pitch, nearly square plan, projecting eaves and shed-type porch roof that extends beyond the edges of the front elevation.

Bays: Bays seldom used before 1900; after 1900, bays often extend full two stories and continue through roof to form wall dormer.

Dormers: Dormers not used on pre-1900 version; dormers (other than wall dormers) seldom used on post-1900 version.

Windows: Pre-1900 houses often have three evenly spaced windows on facade at second floor, corresponding with three openings (two windows and door) on main level; on post-1900 Craftsman version, second floor facade windows are often shaded by small pent roofs.

Ornament: Pre-1900 version may exhibit some Victorian millwork such as that found on one-story worker's cottage; examples built from 1900 to 1910 generally exhibit some classical elements such as dentils, modillions or gable end treated as pediment; after 1910, Craftsman elements are used extensively on this form, including exposed rafters ends and purlins supported by struts.

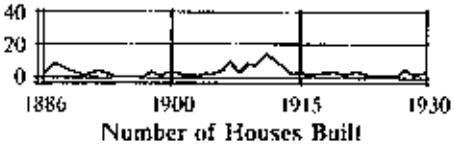
Location: Several early versions in area northwest of 24th and Hamilton (Shinn's Addition); later versions found in Kountze Place area, particularly on Spencer between 18th and 20th, and Lothrop between 19th and 20th; others on Pinkney between 24th and 27th, and Evans between 25th Avenue and 27th.

Characteristics
1. Three evenly spaced windows

3. 4102 North 21st Street, 1983
Two-and-one-half story temple form houses built after 1910 often display elements from the Arts and Crafts movement. Typically these details include shallow pitched roofs with broad overhangs and exposed structural members as seen on this 1912 residence.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

Note: The square plan and basic massing of the post-1900 two-and-a-half story Temple Form house is actually in many cases a Cubic Form house with an alternate roof type. However, due to the dominant street-facing gable end — which in some cases is treated as a classical pediment — it has been referred to here as a Temple Form house. Part of the appeal of this house form during the Craftsman period was undoubtedly its resemblance to Alpine residences, one of the vernacular house types admired by Gustave Stickley and others involved in the American Arts and Crafts Movement.

Percent of this type in study area: 4.0%
Percent of this type designed by architect: 11.7%





Characteristics
1. Shallow roof pitch
2. Projecting eaves
3. Rectangular bay
4. Pent roof
5. Exposed rafter ends
6. Purlins supported by diagonal struts
7. Shed-type porch roof

Cubic Form

After the Temple Form, the two and two-and-one-half story Cubic Form house is the most popular residential type found in North Omaha. The hipped roof version, which is often referred to as the Classic Box, the American Foursquare, or the American Basic is the most common, with over 350 examples in the study area representing nearly 12 percent of all residences. The simple, solid geometric shape from which it gets its many names was first inspired by the classic villas of the Italian Renaissance and has been one of the basic housing forms in America since the late Georgian period. Extremely popular between the turn of the century and the first world war, this standard house type can be found in neighborhoods throughout the United States.

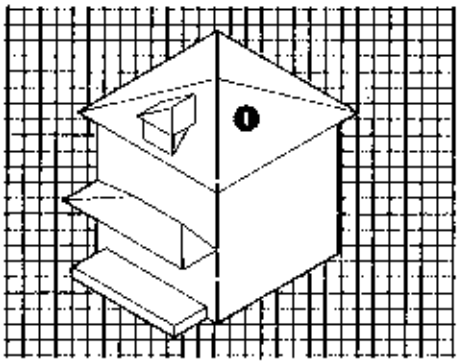
The popularity of the Cubic Form stems primarily from the fact that it is both practical and versatile. After 1900, a reaction to the extravagance of the Victorian era resulted in a general longing for a simpler life, a continuation of the nostalgia first kindled by the celebration of America's Centennial in 1876. Simplicity was also the ruling principle extolled by Gustave Stickley in his magazine *The Craftsman*, which was widely circulated from 1901 to 1917. Stickley called for economical, dignified designs "based on the simplest and most direct principles of construction," with large windows and porches for an abundance of sun. The comfortable, yet pragmatic, Cubic Form house exemplified this philosophy for many of the emerging middle class in need of housing during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

The fact that the Cubic Form — particularly the Classic Box version — is extremely versatile can be seen in the way it adapted to the two major schools of thought influencing architecture at the time. Heading in one direction were the proponents of classical architecture responding to the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and the then recent Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition held in the heart of North Omaha in 1898. On the other hand were those advocating a rejection of historical styles, including the followers of Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School movement, and those pursuing the concepts of Stickley's Craftsman style. Examples of the Classic Box in North Omaha show that although the classical influence prevailed, details from either, and occasionally both, architectural movements were successfully applied to this form.

A variation of the Cubic Form house found in North Omaha is one in which the hipped roof of the Classic Box is replaced with a gable roof, the gable ends being perpendicular to the street. Having essentially the same square plan and massing as all Cubic Form houses, this version appears to be used primarily as a visual alternative to the much more common Classic Box.

1. 1818 Pinkney Street, 1983
Among the names most commonly used for this cubic form house are the Classic Box, the American Foursquare and the American Basic. The efficient and roomy box-like shape of this house made it extremely popular throughout the United States after the turn of the century.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

2. 4106 North 21st Street, 1983
This version of the cubic form house replaces the hipped roof of the Classic Box with a gable roof.
(Omaha City Planning Department)





1

Cubic Form (Classic Box)

Basic form: Two story, nearly square plan, shallow-pitched hip roof with projecting eaves; one story attached porch across entire width of front.

Bays: Bays, when used, are generally shallow; bays may be one or two story, and occasionally project through roof to form wall dormer.

Dormers: Central, front dormer is almost always used on this form; other dormers frequently used on side elevations.

Windows: Large, simple double-hung windows are generally used throughout, often with oversize living room window opposite front entry; upper window sash sometimes divided into smaller lights, often with an elongated diamond pattern.

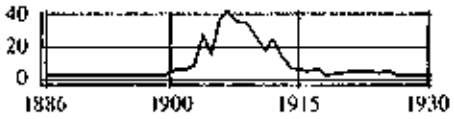
Ornament: Classical details most commonly used include Tuscan porch columns, enclosed eaves, modillions, and dentils; central dormer gable or porch entry often treated as pediment; Prairie style elements, including banding for horizontal emphasis or additional materials such as stucco and brick, are sometimes used; Craftsman details such as exposed rafter ends occasionally used, houses with various combinations of the above elements can be found.

Location: Very common in two large areas — Miami to Pratt, 16th to 20th, and Bristol to Manderson, 24th to 27th; concentrations on Maple between Florence Boulevard and 22nd, and on Evans and Pratt between 25th Avenue and 27th.

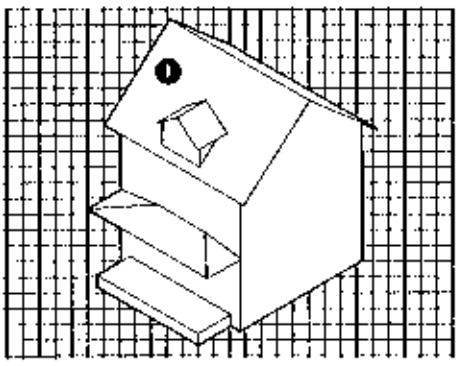
Note: Four Classic Box houses in the study area are built of concrete block molded to resemble stone.

Percent of this type in study area: 12.0%

Percent of this type designed by architect: 13.0%



Characteristics
1. Hip roof
2. Shallow projecting bay
3. Central dormer
4. Double-hung window
5. Tuscan porch columns
6. Classical detailing





2

Cubic Form (Gable roof variation)

Basic form: Two-and-a-half story; nearly square plan with width occasionally greater than depth; moderately pitched gable roof with projecting eaves; gable ends perpendicular to street; one story attached porch across entire width of front.

Bays: Small, projecting bay almost always found on one side of first floor, often with shed roof.

Dormers: Central dormer with gable (echoing gable of main roof) or shed roof most common; paired dormers occasionally used; central dormer frequently breaks roofline to form wall dormer; hipped roof used occasionally on dormers.

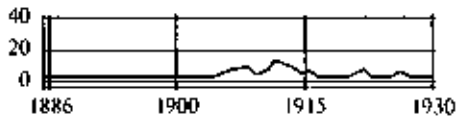
Windows: Windows generally similar to those used on Classic Box; central dormer often has three windows.

Ornament: Ornament tends to be very minimal, classical influences include gable ends and porch entry treated as pediment; Craftsman versions often display exposed rafter ends.

Location: Majority are on Spencer, Lothrop or Emmet between 16th and Florence Blvd., or on Evans and Pratt between 24th and 27th.

Percent of this type in study area: 1.5%

Percent of this type designed by architect: 15.0%



Characteristics
1. Gable ends perpendicular to street
2. Projecting bay with shed roof
3. Gabled central dormer
4. Exposed rafter ends

3. 2922 Nicholas Street, 1984
Bungalows provided low cost housing for many around the time of the first world war and were in many ways the twentieth century counterparts to the worker's cottages of the 1880's. This bungalow, one of six types commonly found in North Omaha, is distinguished by its single gable roof and integral porch.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

Bungalow

Bungalow is a term used to describe a small, low proportioned one to one-and-a-half story house with wide projecting roofs that was tremendously popular during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The rage for bungalows was a national phenomenon with countless varieties being built throughout the United States. The word bungalow comes from a Hindustani adjective, banglā, which means "belonging to Bengal" and is associated with a type of low house with surrounding porches that the Indian government built as resthouses for travelers. But these temporary East Indian huts were just one source of inspiration for the American bungalow. Other influences included the vernacular architecture of Japan, Europe and Scandinavia as well as that of colonial and pioneer America.

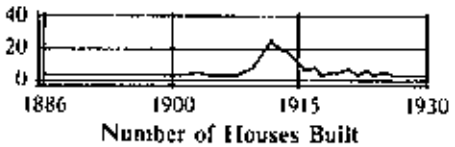
In North Omaha bungalows account for between ten and fifteen percent of all residential structures and the majority can be classified into one of six basic forms. These same forms can be seen repeated many times and in many variations throughout the study area as well as in the pages of popular home magazines and plan books of the early twentieth century. Publications such as *House Beautiful* and Henry Wilson's *The Bungalow Book* were largely responsible for the widespread popularity of the bungalow style. One of the most important periodicals of the time was Gustave Stickley's *Craftsman* magazine. Stickley endorsed the bungalow as a housing form befitting his philosophy that called for simple, utilitarian houses based upon "the most direct principles of construction." While the *Craftsman* often featured work by leading architects working in the bungalow style, such as the sophisticated designs of Charles and Henry Greene of California, Stickley also published examples of another form of building that he greatly admired, the "Summer Bungalow." This term was used to describe a type of vacation retreat that owners often built for themselves in the country. Stickley praised the straightforward qualities of this "native architecture" and felt that it was essentially an outgrowth of the original Eastern bungalows. It is from these small, pragmatic summer houses as well as from distillations of the works of architects such as Greene and Greene that the builders of North Omaha bungalows derived the majority of their forms. Most North Omaha bungalows are practical, vernacular houses — in many ways the twentieth century counterparts of the cottages of 1880's — that present bungalow silhouettes but only occasionally exhibit architectural details that reflect the spirit of the leaders of the bungalow style.

Bungalow A

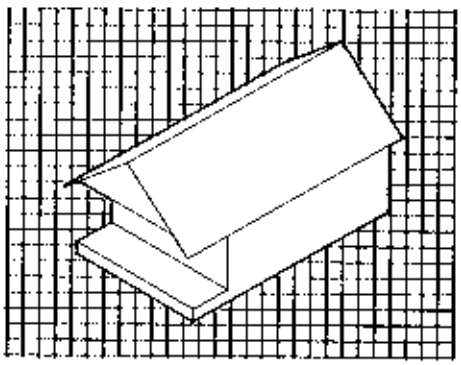
Basic form:	One to one-and-a-half stories, rectangular plan, shallow to moderately pitched gable roof, gable end facing street; integral porch across entire width of front.
Bays:	Shallow bay usually used on one side, often in combination with triple window.
Dormers:	Dormer often used on one side (opposite of bay side) with gable or shed roof.
Windows:	Pair of windows frequently used in gable end; double-hung windows predominate, usually with upper sash divided into three or more lights; casement windows used selectively.
Ornament:	Most examples exhibit minimal Craftsman details such as purlins with diagonal struts and exposed rafter ends; stucco or half-timber used occasionally in gable end.
Location:	Majority north of Pinkney; good examples on Pratt between 16th and 23rd, particularly west of 21st; others on 18th and 19th between Manderson and Sahler; several on Binney between 25th and 27th.

Note: A few examples of this type exhibit elements of high style California Bungalows such as extensive use of stucco, brick, rough stone or shingles and battered (tapered) porch columns.

Percent of this type in study area: 4.0%
Percent of this type designed by architect: 8.2%



Characteristics
1. Shallow pitched gable roof
2. Integral porch
3. Exposed purlins
4. Battered porch piers
5. Triple window in gable end
6. Stucco finish

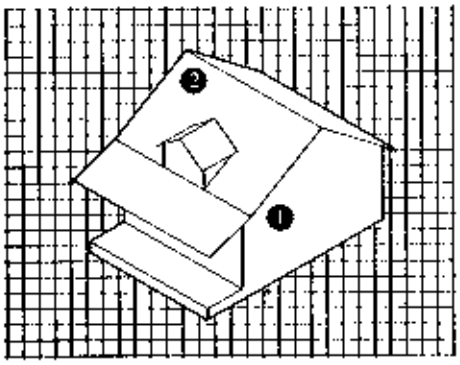




3

1. **2877 Maple Street, 1983**
The features unique to this bungalow form are the double pitched roof, with its ridge running parallel to the street, and the central dormer.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

2. **1804 Evans Street, 1983**
The work of West Coast architects provided inspiration for bungalows across the country. The roofline of this North Omaha house is especially reminiscent of California bungalows.
(Omaha City Planning Department)





1

Bungalow B

Basic form: One-and-a-half story, rectangular plan; gable roof with ridge parallel to street; front portion of roof usually has double pitch; integral porch across entire width of front; predominant central dormer.

Bays: Small, shallow bays, with gable or shed roofs, used occasionally, most often in conjunction with a single window.

Dormers: Predominant central dormer with gable or shed roof, or rarely, hipped roof; dormers occasionally used on rear portion of roof.

Windows: Double-hung windows used predominately, with upper sash divided into three or more lights; living room window often larger; central dormer often has group of three or four windows; casement windows used selectively.

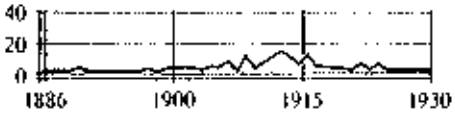
Ornament: Craftsman details such as exposed rafter ends and purlins supported by struts used most often; change in material or texture from first to second story is common; occasional use of stucco or half-timber at second story; clipped gables occasionally used.

Location: Scattered throughout study area north of Emmet; several on Evans between 16th and 17th, and between 21st and 24th; others along 18th Street from just south of Laird to Sahler and on Pinkney between 24th and 25th Avenue.

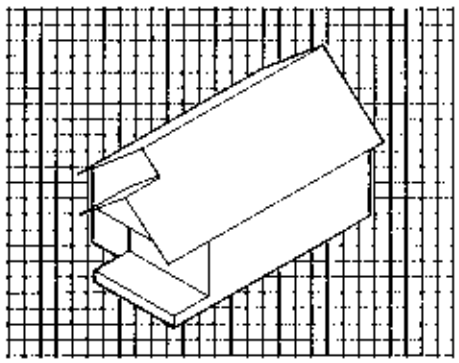
Note: A few examples of this type exhibit elements of high style California Bungalows such as extensive use of stucco, brick, rough stone or shingles and battered (tapered) porch columns.

Percent of this type in study area: 3.0%
Percent of this type designed by architect: 13%

Characteristics
1. Double pitched roof
2. Roof ridge parallel to street
3. Integral porch
4. Central dormer
5. Exposed rafter ends



Number of Houses Built



Bungalow C

Basic form: One story, rectangular plan; shallow to moderately pitched main roof continues at one side to form second roof over projecting bay or porch; gable ends face street.

Bays: Bays, used infrequently, are shallow.

Dormers: Dormers, used infrequently, are small with gabled or shed roofs.

Windows: Single window usually used in gable end of main roof; double-hung windows used predominately with upper sash divided into three or more lights; large single window or triple window often used opposite projecting bay; casement windows used selectively.

Ornament: Craftsman details such as exposed rafter ends and purlins supported by struts used most often.

Location: Scattered throughout portion of study area north of Maple; a few on Nicholas, Caldwell and Myrtle between the North Freeway and 30th Street; several around the 21st and Pratt area.

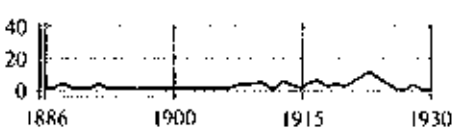


2

Note: A few examples of this type exhibit elements of high style California Bungalows such as extensive use of stucco, brick, rough stone or shingles and battered (tapered) porch columns.

Percent of this type in study area: 2.0%
Percent of this type designed by architect: 11.5%

Characteristics
1. Gable end with single window
2. Purlins supported with struts
3. Compressed porch columns

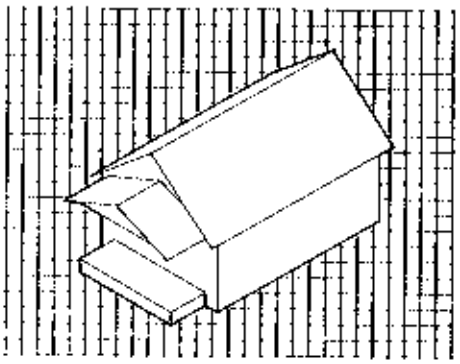


Number of Houses Built

3. 3918 North 19th Street, 1983
The shallow pitched porch roof, echoing the gable of the main roof, identifies this particular bungalow form.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

4. 3603 North 29th Street, 1983
The primary difference between each of the bungalow forms found in North Omaha is the roof configuration. Here a pent roof is used over the porch. Also notable on this house are the battered (tapered) porch piers and the use of stucco, elements associated with high style bungalows.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

Bungalow D



Basic form: One or one-and-a-half story, rectangular plan, shallow to moderate pitched gable roof; porch centered on front with shallow gable roof; gable end faces street.

Bays: Bays, used infrequently, tend to be shallow.

Dormers: Dormers seldom used.

Windows: Paired or triple windows frequently used in gable end of main roof; double-hung windows generally used throughout; selective use of casement windows.

Ornament: Craftsman details such as exposed rafter ends and purlins supported by struts used most often; gable ends occasionally display stucco or half-timber; rarely, gable ends have half-timber effect using wood over clapboard; clipped gables used occasionally.

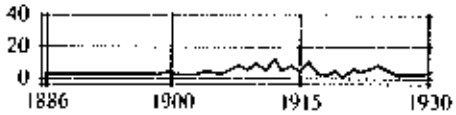
Location: Majority in extreme northern and western portions of study area; several in area between 18th and 21st, Laird and Sahler; several on Miami and Corby between 28th Avenue and 30th Street.



3

Note: Approximately one-half of the houses of this type in North Omaha are influenced by the Bungalow and appear as described here, some exhibiting elements of high style California Bungalows such as extensive use of stucco, brick, rough stone or shingles and battered (tapered) porch columns. However, the remaining houses of this form have a steeper roof and treat the roof and porch gables as pediments. These would be considered Temple Form houses with a variation on the standard porch roof.

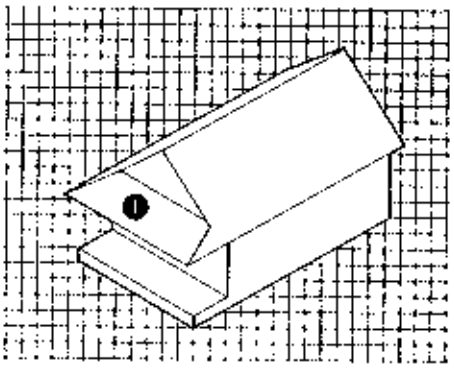
Percent of this type in study area: 4.0%
Percent of this type designed by architect: 1.5%



Number of Houses Built

Characteristics
1. Gabled porch roof
2. Paired window in gable end
3. Shed dormer
4. Battered porch columns

Bungalow E



Basic form: One story, rectangular plan, moderately pitched gable roof blending into pent roof over integral front porch.

Bays: Bays, used infrequently, are shallow.

Dormers: Dormers used occasionally, with gable, shed or hipped roof.

Windows: Paired windows used frequently in gable end; double-hung windows most common throughout; casement windows used selectively.

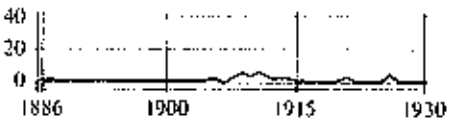
Ornament: Minimal ornament used on this form, roof usually most distinctive feature; Craftsman details used occasionally.

Location: Majority in extreme northeast corner of study area; several on Laird between 16th and 19th; others on Pratt near 16th and again near 30th; four on Binney west of 28th street.



4

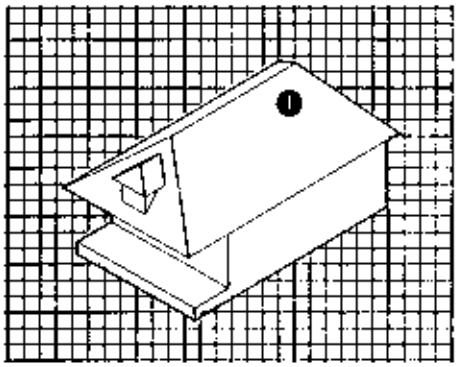
Percent of this type in study area: 1.0%
Percent of this type designed by architect: 3.0%



Number of Houses Built

Characteristics
1. Pent roof
2. Paired window in gable end
3. Exposed purlins
4. Battered porch piers
5. Stucco finish

1. 4114 North 19th Street, 1983
The hipped roof and central dormer are the distinguishing characteristics of this bungalow type.
(Omaha City Planning Department)





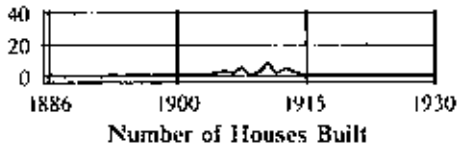
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Bungalow F

Basic form:	One story, rectangular plan, hipped roof; central dormer usually present on front; integral porch.
Bays:	Bays, used infrequently, are shallow.
Dormers:	Central dormer with hipped roof commonly used over front porch; dormers occasionally used on sides of roof.
Windows:	Simple, double-hung windows used most frequently; casement windows used selectively.
Ornament:	Minimal use of ornament; hipped roof and central dormer usually most distinctive elements; early versions display some classical details such as Tuscan porch columns.
Location:	Scattered throughout northern portion of study area, particularly northeast corner; several on 17th, 18th and 19th north of Manderson; others on Pinkney and Wirt between 24th and 27th.

Percent of this type in study area: 1.0%
Percent of this type designed by architect: 11.0%

Characteristics
1. Hip roof
2. Central hipped dormer
3. Integral porch



Number of Houses Built

Queen Anne

A Queen Anne style house, characterized by a picturesque irregularity of form and an attitude toward uninhibited decoration, is the most likely image to come to mind when homes of the Victorian era are mentioned. The form can be traced back to the late 1860's and the work of English architect Richard Norman Shaw. The first American to employ the style was the prominent architect Henry Hobson Richardson in his 1874 Watts Sherman House at Newport, Rhode Island. Popularized by the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, the elaborate Queen Anne was the style used most often throughout America to display a family's social success near the end of the nineteenth century.

In North Omaha the majority of Queen Anne style homes were constructed during the first major building period in the mid to late 1880's, with isolated examples being built up until the turn of the century. Since Queen Anne was a popular style among architects nationally at that time, it was not surprising to find from the survey information that over 40 percent of the Queen Anne style homes in the study area were designed by architects. However, this popular style did not go unnoticed by builders. Homes can be found ranging from very simple, vernacular versions to houses of elaborate design. Builders and architects subscribed to the same basic concept: the creation of as complex and picturesque a house as possible, through the use of as many forms, details, textures and colors as could be imagined. The difference in Queen Anne houses was basically a matter of degree, limited only by the financial capability of the owner.

The most elaborate Queen Anne houses in North Omaha are found along Binney, Wirt and Spencer Streets in the Kountze Place subdivision. These were the homes of the upper middle class business and professional people who could afford an architect designed home costing between $2,500 and $7,000 in the late 1880's, a cost that averaged ten times that of the vernacular worker's cottage of the same era.

More modest and practical houses influenced by the Queen Anne style can be found throughout the North Omaha study area. These structures, while lacking most of the exuberant ornament found on many of the Kountze Place homes, retain enough of the distinctive, irregular Queen Anne form to be easily recognized as members of the same family.

2. John P. Bay House, 2024 Binney Street, 1980
Built in Kountze Place in 1887 at a cost of $5500, the Bay House is one of the finest extant examples of the Queen Anne style of architecture in Omaha.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

3. 2234 Ohio Street, 1984
Vernacular Queen Anne houses often display only a minimal amount of the formal and ornamental features associated with high style Queen Anne architecture.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

Queen Anne



2

Basic form: Two-and-a-half story, square or rectangular plan made to appear complex and asymmetrical through the use of deep projecting bays and corner towers; complex, irregular silhouette created by multiplicity of roof types, often steeply pitched hipped main roof intersected by numerous gabled roofs and polygonal or conical tower roof; occasionally dormers and multiple chimneys used to enhance irregular roof line; wraparound porch is common.

Bays: Extensive use of bays of many types, particularly two-and-a-half story projecting bays with gable roofs that enhance the overall effect of complexity in plan and silhouette.

Dormers: Dormers occasionally used.

Windows: Wide variety of window types are used together on one house and often include the following: double-hung windows of various size and muntin configuration used singly, in pairs, or two narrow windows flanking a wide window; windows with transom or stained glass borders; multi-paned windows forming a series of squares; half-round windows.

Ornament: Prolific use of many types of ornament and texture; classical details used extensively and may include: dentils; modillions; Palladian windows; Doric, Tuscan or Corinthian columns; roof and porch gable treated as pediment. Multiple materials and textures used decoratively and may include combinations of: clapboard; quarry-faced stone; shingles (often fishscale); decorative brickwork including corbeled chimneys; turned, cut-out, or incised wood trim; pendants; decorative brackets; stamped metal.

Location:* Majority found in Kountze Place area, particularly along Binney and Wirt Streets; others along Emmet and Pinkney between 16th and 23rd; several on Manderson and Spaulding between 25th Avenue and 27th; a few isolated examples scattered south of Maple as far as Decatur.

Vernacular Queen Anne



3

Basic form: Overall simplification of the basic Queen Anne form; bays often shallow; porch often limited to front of house only.

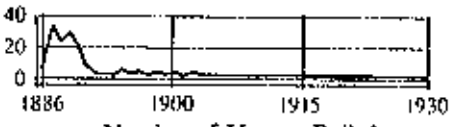
Bays: Fewer and shallower bays than on Queen Anne style.

Dormers: Dormers seldom used.

Windows: Fewer different window types used than on Queen Anne style; windows often simple and similar to those found on vernacular house forms.

Ornament: Same vocabulary of ornament as used on Queen Anne, but much more limited; most commonly used elements include: fishscale shingles; small, decorative windows in gable ends; simple, classical porch columns; gable ends and porch entry treated as pediment.

Percent of this type in study area: 4.0%*
Percent of this type designed by architect: 40.0%*



Number of Houses Built *

Characteristics
1. Polygonal corner tower
2. Intersecting gable roof
3. Hip roof
4. Dormer
5. Wraparound porch
6. Swan's neck pediment
7. Fishscale shingles
8. Gable end treated as pediment
9. Pedimented entry
10. Dentils

*(Combined for both high style & vernacular Queen Anne)

1. Sacred Heart Church, 2206 Binney Street, 1979
Built in 1902 by the prominent Omaha architectural firm of Fisher and Lawrie, Sacred Heart Church is reminiscent of the Gothic cathedrals of Europe.
(Omaha City Planning Department)
2. 1607 Lothrop Street, 1984
The rectangular, box-like shape and flat roof of the Italianate style made it a popular choice for many early multi-family structures in North Omaha.
(Omaha City Planning Department)
3. 4201 North 28th Avenue, 1983
The use of the segmental arch over windows and doors identifies this industrial building with the Italianate style.
(Omaha City Planning Department)



1

Late Gothic Revival

The Late Gothic Revival style developed out of the ecclesiastical work of Boston architect Ralph Adams Cram. The historical basis for this style was the Late Gothic architecture of England and France. Although churches were the most common structures to be built in Gothic Revival, designers of educational and commercial buildings employed the style as well.

The pointed arch is the most distinguished characteristic of the Late Gothic Revival. Other features include window tracery, leaded glass, battlements and pinnacles.

Sacred Heart Church, located at 2206 Binney Street, is one of the finest examples of Late Gothic Revival architecture in the city. Other churches, educational buildings and church related structures within the North Omaha study area exhibit Gothic details, occasionally in combination with elements of other styles such as Romanesque Revival or Jacobethan.

Characteristics
1. Pointed arch
2. Window tracery
3. Leaded glass
4. Pinnacle



2

Italianate

The Italianate style was popular primarily as a commercial style in North Omaha during the 1880's and 1890's. It evolved out of an earlier residential style, the Italian villa style, which was based on the picturesque vernacular architecture of the Italian countryside. Most of the few remaining examples of Italianate in North Omaha were buildings originally designed for use as either neighborhood stores with living quarters above or as apartment buildings.

Italianate structures are distinguished by their overall boxy shapes, flat roofs and projecting, bracketed cornices, often the only remaining clues to the style. Other characteristics may include vertical emphasis in both the building volume and detail, angular projecting bays, the use of segmental or stilted segmental arches and sharp, angular details. Very few single family residences in North Omaha exhibit elements of the Italianate style. An industrial example can be found at the corner of 28th Avenue and Sahler Street.

Characteristics
1. Flat roof
2. Segmental arch
3. Bracketed cornice



3

4. 2022 Wirt Street, 1982
Eastlake ornament enlivens the roofline of this 1887 house.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

5. Rising Star Baptist Church, 1823 Lothrop Street, 1984
Mass, volume and scale are emphasized over detail and ornament in buildings of the Romanesque Revival style.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

Eastlake

Eastlake is essentially a decorative style of applied ornament. Many Eastlake structures would be considered Queen Anne style if it were not for their distinctive details inspired by the writings of English architect Charles Lock Eastlake. Many builders and architects in the 1870's and 80's borrowed freely from the decorative vocabulary established by Eastlake's popular book *Hints on Household Taste*, first published in America in 1872. It is interesting to note, however, that Eastlake himself wanted nothing to do with the style of architecture that had come to be associated with his name. He called it "extravagant and bizarre" and claimed that it was completely unrelated to the type and quality of work that he encouraged.

Eastlake style houses are distinguished by the vertical emphasis of their projecting bays and windows as well as their unique ornament. Perforated barge boards and incised or gouged panels are details particularly characteristic of the Eastlake style. Other elements include turned porch posts, balusters and king posts. The use of cut-outs and decorative knobs or pendants is also common.

In North Omaha Eastlake details were usually applied to either simplified Queen Anne forms or to the one or one-and-a-half story temple form. However, most of the examples of this style that exist in the study area have been severely altered and display only limited Eastlake elements.



4

Characteristics
1. Perforated barge boards
2. Cut-out panels
3. Pendant
4. Windows with vertical emphasis
5. Fishscale shingles

Romanesque Revival

The Romanesque Revival style was popular as early as 1840 in some parts of the country and continued to be used throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, primarily for churches and government buildings. The style was based on Medieval Romanesque architecture and is recognized through the predominant use of the semi-circular arch for window and door openings. Square corner towers with pyramidal roofs are also representative of the style.

A fine example of the Romanesque Revival style in North Omaha is the Rising Star Baptist Church built at 1823 Lothrop in 1890 by the Omaha architectural firm of Walker and Best.



5

Characteristics
1. Semi-circular arch
2. Square corner tower
3. Pyramidal and polygonal roof elements
4. Intersecting gable

1. **2120 Wirt Street, 1982**
Omaha architect Frederick Clarke chose the Dutch Colonial Revival style for his own house built in the Kountze Place subdivision in 1903. (Omaha City Planning Department)

2. **Calvin Memorial Presbyterian Church, 3105 North 24th Street, 1983**
Neo-Classical Revival buildings expressed the preference for classical forms during the first quarter of the twentieth century. (Omaha City Planning Department)

3. **2035 North 19th Street, 1984**
A temple-like porch links this simple 1905 house to the Neo-Classical Revival style. (Omaha City Planning Department)



1

Colonial Revival

The Colonial Revival style, popular between 1890 and 1915, developed as a reaction to the Victorian tastes of the late nineteenth century. While early examples of the style frequently retained vestiges of the Queen Anne style such as an asymmetrical plan or encircling porch, later structures were often truer to their early American models.

The example shown here, located at 2120 Wirt Street, represents one segment of the Colonial Revival style, the Dutch Colonial Revival, denoted by the use of a gambrel roof. Other typical Colonial Revival elements found on the house include the symmetrical plan, classical details and the Palladian window centered over the main entry.

Characteristics
1. Gambrel roof
2. Palladian window
3. Classical entry portico
4. Tuscan columns
5. Dentils



2



3

Neo-Classical Revival

The term Neo-Classical Revival, as it is used in this study, is intended to encompass two other styles based on classical and Renaissance architecture — the Second Renaissance Revival style and Beaux Arts Classicism. These styles were popular between 1890 and 1915 and all contributed to the general interest in Classicism at the time.

The Neo-Classical Revival buildings of North Omaha are not by any means pure examples of any one style. They are often simply vernacular forms that display a mixture of applied classical details. They are eclectic, individual structures designed by local architects and builders.

The preference for the classical styles was inspired by the grand expositions that had been held throughout the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The most famous of these was the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. The dazzling architecture of this "White City" caused a dramatic shift in architectural taste from that of elaborate Victorian to one of discipline and refinement. The 1898 Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition held in the Kountze Place neighborhood reinforced the desire for classical architecture in Omaha.

Many North Omaha residences, particularly in the Kountze Place neighborhood, display elements of the Neo-Classical Revival style. These details include classical porch columns of a particular architectural order, gable ends treated as temple pediments, Palladian windows and the use of dentils and modillions. Often these details are found on vernacular housing types such as the hipped roof Cubic Form (Classic Box) and the one-and-a-half story Temple Form house.

Many commercial buildings in North Omaha also exhibit classical influence. Quoin-like brickwork at building corners, pedimented entries and windows, keystones in lintels, and rooflines punctuated with urn-like forms are all reminiscent of the classical spirit of the expositions. A fine institutional structure representative of the Neo-Classical Revival style is the Calvin Memorial Church designed by local architect F. A. Henninger. Major classical elements on this building include a temple-like entry portico and a central domed roof.

Characteristics
1. Pediment
2. Two-story entry portico
3. Ionic column capital
4. Dentils
5. Tuscan porch columns
6. Classical molding

4. 1629 Lothrop Street, 1984
This brick and stucco residence displays elements of the Jacobethan Revival style.
(Omaha City Planning Department)
5. Great Plains Black Museum, 2213 Lake Street, 1980
Architect Thomas Kimball based his 1906 design for this structure, formerly the Webster Telephone Exchange Building, on the Jacobethan Revival style.
(Omaha City Planning Department)
6. Charles Storz House, 1901 Wirt Street, 1983
Arts and Crafts style structures, such as this 1909 residence by Omaha architects Fisher and Lawrie, display a fascination with wood details and structural elements.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

Jacobethan Revival

Jacobethan is a term that is the composite of the words Elizabethan and Jacobean, the two original architectural styles on which many Jacobethan designs were based. The style was used primarily between the years 1890 and 1915. Typical features of Jacobethan Revival include gable ends that extend above the roof and the division of windows into rectangular lights through the use of enlarged mullions.

Two examples of the Jacobethan Revival style in North Omaha — a residence at 1629 Lothrop and the Great Plains Black Museum at 2213 Lake — exhibit elements typical of the style. In both cases less expensive materials such as brick and wood were substituted for what would have more typically been stone on more elaborate Jacobethan Revival structures.

Characteristics
1. Gable end extended above roof
2. Projecting bay
3. Enlarged window mullions
4. Corbeled brickwork
5. Round-arched doorway



4



5

Arts and Crafts

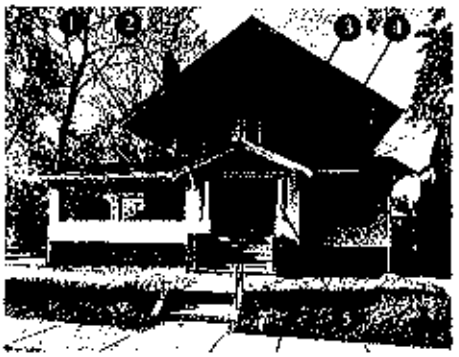
The Arts and Crafts style was part of a larger movement that encompassed many aspects of design other than architecture, including the design of fabrics, wallpapers and home furnishings. As H. Allen Brooks states in his book, *The Prairie School, Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries*, "it was an attitude, an approach to a problem that advocated no specific vocabulary of forms. It pleaded for simplicity, elimination, and respect for materials."

This desire for simple and finely crafted work is rooted in the philosophy of English designer William Morris and his associates. After Morris' death in 1896, the Arts and Crafts movement became popular in America, primarily through such widely read publications as *House Beautiful* and Gustave Stickley's *Craftsman* magazine.

Although "no specific vocabulary of forms" was advocated by those working in the Arts and Crafts spirit, certain architectural details have come to be associated with the domestic Arts and Crafts style. The most common of these included the use of exposed structural members, particularly rafter ends and purlins with supporting struts, roofs with broad, sheltering overhangs, and a fascination with various methods of wood joinery for decorative effect.

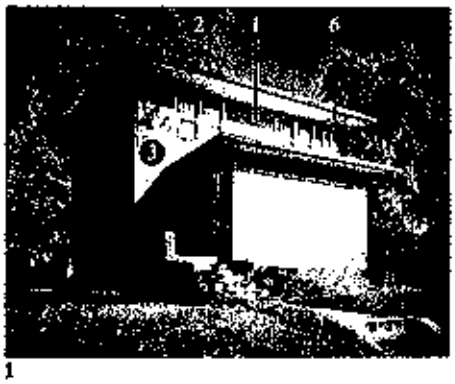
Arts and Crafts details are most commonly found in the North Omaha study area on the vernacular two-and-a-half story Temple Form house, such as the elaborate Charles Storz house at 1901 Wirt Street. Other houses representative of the style can be found along Lothrop Street between 19th and 20th Streets.

Characteristics
1. Decoratively cut rafter ends
2. Purlins with diagonal struts
3. Overhanging eaves
4. Enlarged dentils
5. Tuscan columns



6

1. 2102 Binney Street, 1982
The use of projecting eaves and a shallow, stuccoed second story contribute to the Prairie style appearance of this vernacular house.
(Omaha City Planning Department)
2. St. John A.M.E. Church, 2402 North 22nd Street, 1978
Patterned after the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, St. John A.M.E. Church is the finest example of Prairie style architecture in Omaha.
(Omaha City Planning Department)
3. Harry Buford House, 1804 North 30th Street, 1983
Extremely popular in the 1920's and 1930's, the Period Revival house emphasized the romantic, picturesque qualities of English, European and early American vernacular architecture.



1



2

Prairie

The basis of all Prairie style architecture is the early twentieth century philosophy and work of prominent American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, the acknowledged master of the style. Wright thought that Midwesterners should recognize the natural beauty of the quiet, level prairies and respect this beauty with structures of low, horizontal proportions and sheltering overhangs. This philosophy resulted in a style of architecture that came to be used throughout the United States for a variety of buildings during its peak period of popularity between 1900 and the early 1920's.

Of the few examples of Prairie style buildings that exist in North Omaha, the majority are residential examples, with Prairie details applied to popular vernacular forms such as the Cubic Form. The one exception is St. John A.M.E. Church, probably the finest example of Prairie style architecture in the entire city. Its massing, horizontal emphasis and projecting eaves are all reminiscent of Wright's own work, particularly his 1906 Unity Temple of Oak Park, Illinois.

Another fine example of Prairie style architecture in North Omaha is the Strehlow Apartment complex. Here ornament very similar to that used by Wright, as well as by Wright's one-time employer Louis Sullivan, can be found.

Characteristics
1. Stucco finish at second floor
2. Projecting eaves
3. Horizontal emphasis
4. Banding
5. Brick finish
6. Brackets



3



4

Period Revival

Period Revival style structures were popular during the first forty years of the twentieth century and were patterned after buildings of various earlier periods of architecture both in America and abroad. Models included American Colonial, English Georgian, English Elizabethan (Tudor), French Norman, Spanish Colonial and Pueblo buildings. General characteristics of the style included an irregular outline and an overall picturesque quality. Basic massing and proportion, as well as materials and details were all freely borrowed from historical examples. Designers emphasized overall effect rather than stylistic accuracy.

Very few Period Revival structures are located in the North Omaha study area. One good residential example, the Harry Buford house, exists at 1804 North 30th Street. A commercial adaptation of the style can be found at 2318 North 16th Street, a filling station built in 1930 by the Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf Oil Company.

Characteristics
1. Irregular, picturesque rooflint
2. Half-timbering
3. Brick finish

(Omaha City Planning Department)

4. 2318 North 16th Street, 1983

Although thought of primarily as a residential style, Period Revival was also popular for commercial buildings such as this 1930 filling station.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

5. 4301 North 28th Street, 1984

The stepped facade, round corners and horizontal banding of this unusual industrial structure are associated with the Art Moderne style of architecture.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

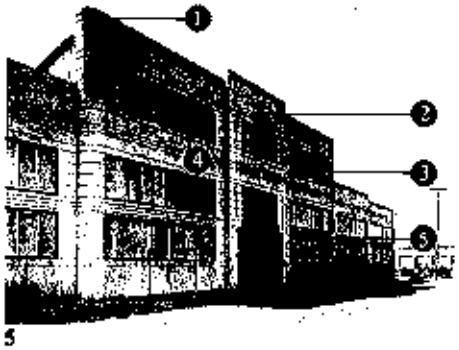
6. North 24th Street between Lake and Ohio, 1983

These simple, practical structures are typical of main street commercial architecture after the turn of the century.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

Art Moderne

Aerodynamics was a concept that affected all areas of design during the Art Moderne period of the 1930's and 40's. Radios, toasters and buildings, even though they were non-moving, were streamlined along with airplanes and automobiles, which were the more logical recipients of such consideration. Features found on Art Moderne buildings included rounded corners, smooth surface areas and horizontal bands of windows. Glazed brick, glass block, concrete and smoothly finished metals were commonly used. Ornament was generally restricted to surface panels of low relief. Thin bands, often in groups of three, frequently trail from an ornament or round window, or encircle the entire building. The original intent of these lines was probably to simulate air streams.

A unique example of the Art Moderne style can be found in North Omaha at 4301 North 28th Street.



5

Characteristics
1. Round corners
2. Stepped facade
3. Horizontal window bands
4. Concrete finish
5. Horizontal bands

Commercial Vernacular

Commercial vernacular buildings are simple, pragmatic structures built between 1900 and 1940 that can be found in nearly all commercial areas of North Omaha. They are generally one or two-story brick structures with flat roofs and little ornament with an emphasis, as in vernacular residential architecture, on practicality over style. The basic rectangular shape of these buildings was derived from the parcels of land that they rest on and completely fill. They are detailed only on the front (or the front and one side in the case of a corner building) with blank side walls that abut adjacent buildings. Back walls are strictly utilitarian. This orientation follows in the tradition of most urban commercial architecture up to the twentieth century, including false front architecture, in that only the street facing facade received any stylistic consideration.

Ornament on commercial vernacular structures is very simple. Various configurations of brick were often employed to emulate the more elaborate and costly stone details of high style buildings. Most often ornament appears to have been roughly based on details from either or both of the two major schools of architectural thought at the turn of the century — the classical tradition and the then emerging modern movement. Corbelled brickwork was often used to create a cornice-like effect. Irregular parapets which appear to have first been influenced by classical pediments and Renaissance facades, were employed to add interest to the roofline. A common feature on commercial vernacular structures reminiscent of the Prairie style of architecture is the use of a simple brick band to define a portion of the wall as a rectangular panel, often with colored tiles to accentuate the corners.

Several duplexes and small apartment complexes in North Omaha also display the boxy rectangular form and simplified details of the commercial vernacular form.



6

Characteristics
1. Rectangular form
2. Detail limited to facade
3. Decorative brickwork

Rehabilitation Considerations

The best buildings have a certain "rightness" about them. Nothing seems out of place or out of character. It has nothing to do with expense or size. It is a matter of appropriateness. All the parts work together and contribute to the feeling of a harmonious whole.

The harmony of a building's design — thoughtfully considered at the time of construction — is affected when any of the individual parts of that design are altered over time. Rehabilitation* can either detract from or contribute to (or have no effect on) a building's overall character. In a sensitive rehabilitation alterations do not adversely affect the design unity of the structure as a whole. They are appropriate to the nature of the building being rehabilitated.

Sensitive rehabilitations depend primarily on two things for success. One is an awareness on the part of the renovator of the important elements of the building being renovated and how those elements fit together. Without this knowledge it is difficult to determine the effect of a proposed change. The preceding information in this section on architectural style identified elements important to the character of the buildings most commonly found in North Omaha.

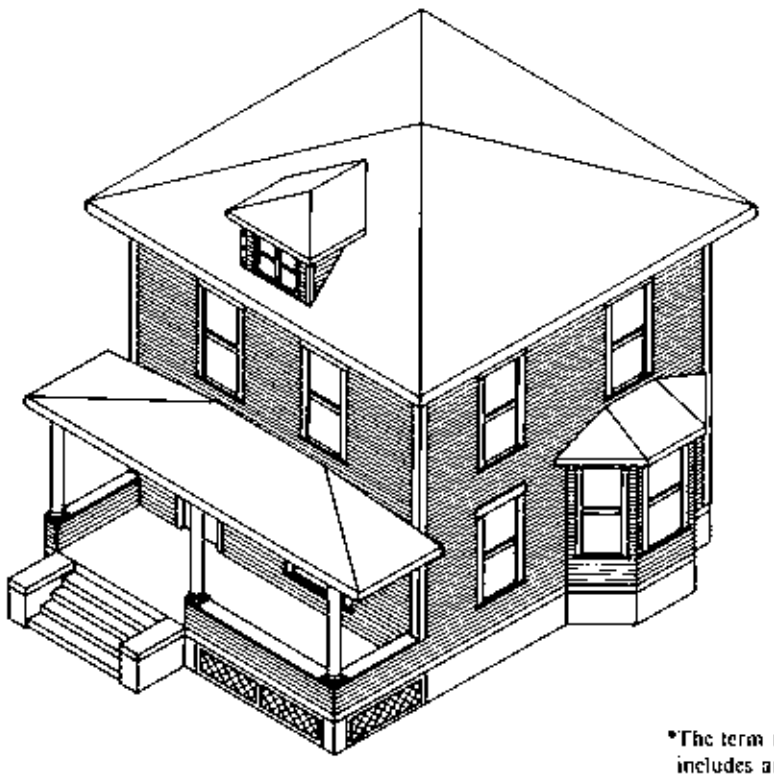
The evaluation of proposed work is the second important part of sensitive rehabilitation. One good way to assess the impact of proposed changes on a particular structure is to study comparable alterations already completed on buildings of a similar style in the surrounding neighborhood. This is a quick way to visualize changes and judge their appropriateness before any work is done or money is spent.

General Guidelines

The following is a brief discussion of features important to the majority of houses in North Omaha. It is intended to serve as a general guide to sensitive rehabilitation. More detailed information can be found in rehabilitation guides and technical brochures available for use at the Omaha City Planning Department.

The Porch

The porch is singly the most important feature on most vernacular houses in the North Omaha study area. Without it the character of the entire structure is drastically changed. In terms of design, the porch has several major roles. It serves as a transitional element between the inside and the outside of the house. It defines and enhances the structure's main entrance. Most importantly, it provides a major sculptural element to the mass of the building. Without the porch the box-like shape of the structure becomes very evident and the house appears much less interesting due to the lack of significant three-dimensional features. In addition, when the porch is removed, much of the building's most interesting architectural detail goes with it, since the prominent front-and-center location of the porch makes it a natural recipient of



*The term rehabilitation, as used in this report, includes any activity that has the potential to change the character of a building, ranging from routine maintenance to major remodeling.

Figure 1

decoration. The complete removal of a porch should be avoided.

Details

The details referred to here are both those that are strictly ornamental, such as spindles, fishscale shingles or special architectural moldings and those that are functional, such as balasters, rafter ends or porch columns. Architectural details add interest and uniqueness to a house and should be retained whenever possible. Deteriorated features should be repaired or replaced with similar components. The wholesale removal of architectural details should be strictly avoided. When replacement of a particular feature is the only practical alternative, the appropriateness of the replacement material should be carefully considered. For example, a modern flush door with staggered diamond-shaped windows should not be used to replace a turn of the century paneled door. Similarly, lightweight wrought iron work or steel pipe columns are inappropriate substitutes for the large scale wooden or stucco original porch columns found on many North Omaha homes, as they do not *appear* sturdy enough to support the roof even though they may actually be structurally sound.

The size and type of original windows used should also be respected. Window openings should not be reduced in size to allow for the use of a modern, off-the-shelf replacement window. Casement windows should not replace double-hung windows. Divisions within windows should match those of the original design. The idea is to stay within the architectural vocabulary established by the builders of the house.

Siding Material

The most common siding material used for homes in North Omaha is narrow (4") clapboard siding. Stucco or stucco and half-timber is also used, primarily on bungalows. The texture and scale of these materials was an important consideration to the designer of each house and should also be a consideration during rehabilitation. The preferred method for the maintenance of clapboard houses is to repair and repaint existing siding. Similarly, stucco and half-timber should also be repaired rather than covered over. If new siding material is to be used on a clapboard house it should be of the same width and texture (simulated raised wood grain is not appropriate) as the original material. 8" siding should not be used to replace 4" siding because the texture and scale of the entire house is adversely affected. Detailed architectural features should be retained as they exist rather than covered over, boxed in, or drastically simplified. Important window openings should not be lost merely to simplify re-siding efforts.

Figure 1 shows a common North Omaha house type, the Classic Box, in its original state. Figure 2 shows how various rehabilitation projects have adversely affected the character of the house.

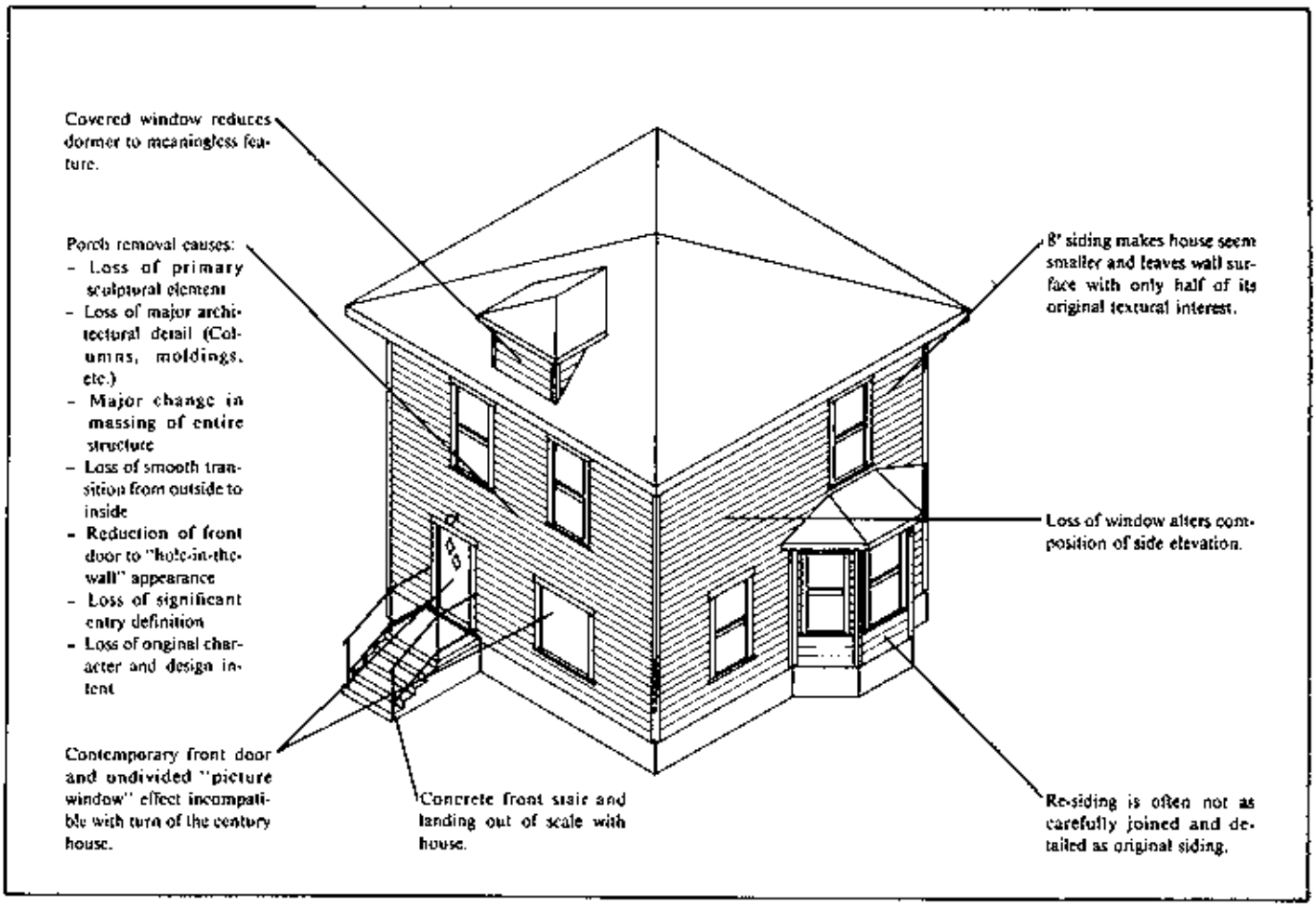


Figure 2

IV. Conservation Issues, Goals and Strategies



1. Wirt Street Scene, 1896
(Omaha Public Library)
2. 25th Avenue and Evans Street, Looking West, 1984
(Omaha City Planning Department)

The concept of neighborhood conservation views the neighborhood as a precious resource for the city. It implies preserving the physical and social structure of an area in order to maintain it as a rewarding place for city life. Conservation involves people working together to maintain houses and neighborhood businesses and to form groups to pursue common interests. This can help create a revitalized neighborhood that benefits both existing and new residents.

However, neighborhood development is a complex process. Each possible direction raises other important and often contradictory issues. It is important to recognize these issues before developing a strategy for the conservation of a neighborhood.

North Omaha as a neighborhood is at a critical stage in its history. The neighborhood has experienced both disinvestment and population decline. A majority of its residents have low or moderate incomes. Many homeowners in the neighborhood are elderly; most of the neighborhood building stock was built before 1940. However, there are also increasing signs of health. These include more investment in housing and business enterprises; a greater sense of community and neighborhood growth; and a greater concentration of City resources on the neighborhood's development. In addition, North Omaha has important assets — it is located relatively near Omaha's reviving Central Business District; it possesses a beautiful and mature physical environment; and it is well served by major transportation facilities.

These factors produce an atmosphere of change — changing occupancy, a changing local economy, and a changing physical environment. An appropriate neighborhood conservation strategy must channel this change toward self-sustaining improvement. In developing such a strategy for North Omaha, the following issues must be considered:

1. The state of the neighborhood's building stock.
2. The questions of adapting this building stock to the world of the 1980's.
3. The progressive loss of buildings and population through both public and private actions.
4. Demographic changes in the neighborhood.
5. Changing land uses and their effect on the neighborhood.



2

6. The quality of neighborhood services and the area's environment as North Omaha competes with other neighborhoods in the city.

We will now consider these issues in detail.

The State of the Building Stock

The overriding fact of North Omaha's building stock is its age. About two-thirds of the neighborhood's buildings were built before 1940. These buildings were constructed to different standards for different markets. For example, many of the small houses in additions south of Lake Street served successive groups of new arrivals in North Omaha. Many of these homes were built modestly and have sometimes surpassed their serviceable life. The preceding historical section has shown how these houses filtered from one group to another and were finally occupied by blacks. By the 1960's and 1970's federal and local open housing laws provided more housing choices to the black community. With black population movement to the north and west, these small houses were either abandoned or occupied by people with progressively lower incomes and fewer housing alternatives. As a result, this part of North Omaha has experienced large population losses and substantial demolition during the last fifteen years. On the other hand, houses in the Kountze Place neighborhood were originally built for middle and upper income residents. As a result, houses there had longer service lives and attracted new residents, particularly after this formerly all-white area was opened to black property owners in the 1950's.

The issue of age of buildings in North Omaha is complicated by a variety of economic problems. Most of the neighborhood's housing stock is of wood frame construction. This increases required maintenance of the structure, because wood is more vulnerable to weather or insect infestation than masonry. However, many of North Omaha's homeowners have limited incomes, forcing them to defer major maintenance on their houses. Deferred maintenance, in turn, can lead to major structural problems that can be corrected only by substantial rehabilitation.

Related economic problems have also led to deterioration of rental housing in the neighborhood. Market rents in North Omaha are considerably below average for the city of Omaha. This limits the income that an owner receives from his property. In these situations, landlords often choose to maximize their possible income by dividing a building into as many units as possible and to minimize operating costs by deferring repairs. This taxes buildings beyond their capacity and hastens their deterioration.

A neighborhood conservation strategy must address the physical condition of the neighborhood's building stock, to deter-

mine those structures which can undergo feasible rehabilitation. It must also consider making financing available that makes home improvements affordable to homeowners and economically feasible to investor owners.

Adapting the Building Stock to the 1980's

Housing styles, energy costs and family size have all changed from the time that most of North Omaha's buildings were constructed. Large houses with many windows and little insulation are not energy efficient, and high fuel costs have made the problems worse. Some efforts to make houses more energy efficient compromise their architectural character. Porches are enclosed or siding added, although these actions are not as effective as other weatherization procedures. Porch columns and railings, or other details that made the building distinctive, are unnecessarily removed or covered over, greatly altering the appearance of the structure.

The rising energy costs of maintaining large, uninsulated houses have fallen on those least able to bear them. Low and moderate income residents, particularly the elderly who must meet their needs on fixed incomes, do not have funds available for weatherization of large homes. At the same time, families are no longer as large as when these houses were built. The demand for smaller, more efficient homes can make the large houses less attractive in the real estate market.

There are several ways to adapt building stock to the needs of the 1980's. One direction must focus on weatherization programs, in order to make these larger homes more energy efficient for their current residents, and to attract new homebuyers. Such programs should emphasize insulation and repair or replacement of doors and windows to minimize heat loss and air infiltration. These measures, properly done, can respect the character of the dwellings.

A neighborhood conservation strategy in an historic neighborhood must balance the need for energy efficiency with maintaining the building's important features. Other alternatives, such as sympathetically converting large structures to two-family homes, or combining an office and residential use, should also be considered.

The Progressive Loss of Buildings and Population Through Public and Private Actions

The loss of housing stock in North Omaha is related to a decrease in population in the area. Between 1970 and 1980 the population of North Omaha declined from 19,374 to 10,912. The loss of housing units has occurred because of disinvestment by owners and through public actions. Disinvestment refers to an owner's failure to maintain his property, which often results in a building that deteriorates until it is no longer useful and is abandoned. Vacant buildings attract vandalism, and eventually condemnation and demolition are the final answers. This process usually leaves an unmaintained vacant lot which breaks up the streetscape of houses and yards.



1

Public actions have also led to a loss of housing stock. The greatest number of demolitions have occurred through North Freeway acquisitions; other redevelopment projects by the City and other organizations have also taken dwellings. In some cases the loss of housing has not had a negative effect, but instead relocated residents from buildings that had reached the end of their serviceable life. However, these major public actions have an effect on social relationships within the neighborhood. Dislocated residents usually moved outside of North Omaha to find sound housing.

In order to halt this loss of buildings and people in North Omaha, a neighborhood conservation strategy must maintain sound housing units. It is important to rescue vacant or abandoned buildings before they are allowed to deteriorate beyond the point of repair. Other strategies must address new construction that is compatible with the existing neighborhood environment, and located on available vacant lots.

Demographic Changes in the Neighborhood

Although there are many physical changes occurring in North Omaha related to revitalization, one social transition results from the makeup of the population. Many of the residents in North Omaha are elderly. Therefore, the neighborhood is entering a critical juncture. The healthiest direction rests in the ability of North Omaha to attract new homeowners, including younger families. Eventually the whole neighborhood would undergo a life-cycle change, as young families with children purchase homes and help to revitalize the neighborhood. In some cases, responsible investors may purchase the houses and maintain them as rental property, or, with very large homes, convert them to suitable multi-family dwellings.



2

However, there are also less favorable alternatives. Some property owners purchase dwellings and subdivide them into as many apartments as possible in order to maximize income. Another negative option occurs when a property fails to attract new purchasers, and is neglected and eventually abandoned.

In some cities, as revitalization of older neighborhoods has occurred, redevelopment costs and rising rents have caused displacement of low and moderate income residents. While revitalization is a desired result, it is also important to address the dilemma of how to encourage investment in North Omaha and attract new families without displacing the existing residents.

In order to attract new homeowners, strategies should include marketing techniques which residents can use to sell their neighborhood. In addition, incentives for new owners could encourage young families to locate in older neighborhoods as a positive result of the life-cycle transition. A conservation strategy should address methods of monitoring negative changes such as speculative buying of properties, and develop means to enable existing residents to remain in the neighborhood and benefit from improvements.

Changing Land Uses and Their Effect on the Neighborhood

Industrial encroachment and incompat-

1. **Rehabilitation of Historic Bay Residence, 2024 Binney Street, 1981**
 Removal of asbestos siding revealed the original clapboard underneath, which was repaired or replaced.
 (Omaha City Planning Department)
2. **Children Playing at Kellom Greenbelt, 1984**
 Attracting young families with children is one strategy to revitalize neighborhoods with an ag-

ing population.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

3. Area Near 18th and Paul Streets, 1984
Industrial expansion has drastically altered the character of the formerly residential neighborhoods located in the southeast section of North Omaha.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

4. McDonald's, 24th and Cuming Streets, 1984
Commercial activity reinforces residential redevelopment and is vital in attracting residents to older neighborhoods. This McDonald's is located near a proposed commercial center planned to serve the nearby Kellom Knoll Apartments and Creighton University.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

ible land uses disturb the continuity of a neighborhood and lower the value of adjoining properties. With industrial areas along the Belt Line Railroad on the north and along 16th Street and Cuming on the south, North Omaha's adjacent residential areas face pressures from industrial expansion. The southeastern corner of North Omaha has been particularly vulnerable to pressure from expanding warehouse and trucking businesses.

Incompatible land uses scattered about the neighborhood on one or two lots can also have a negative effect on a residential area. A corner commercial building that formerly housed a grocery store or a gas station becomes undesirable when rezonings allow less controlled uses. Similarly, a vacant lot with several abandoned cars in the interior of a residential neighborhood is an illegal use that breaks up the continuity of the residences and hinders neighborhood improvement efforts. Marginal or quasi-industrial uses in commercial districts contribute to the decline of such areas, as people-oriented businesses move to more hospitable surroundings elsewhere.

The end result of industrial encroachment and incompatible land uses is the spread of blight and deterioration. Properties adjacent to industrial and incompatible land uses are no longer as desirable, and as their marketability declines, these buildings often deteriorate because there is little profit in maintaining them. Fortunately, methods for dealing with land use problems are available through City Codes. Strategies for neighborhood conservation in regard to land use must call for affirmative zoning enforcement and prosecution by City officials in order to help neighborhoods battle the blight caused by incompatible land uses. At the same time, City officials should pay particular attention to rezoning requests to insure that such actions will not have a negative effect on nearby residents and their property values. A strategy must also address the involvement of neighborhood groups and their need for vigilance in dealing with industrial encroachment as well as incompatible land uses.

The Quality of Neighborhood Services and the Area's Environment

Commercial development is important to the overall revitalization of North Omaha. Just as the deterioration of the 24th Street business district after the disturbances of the 1960's hastened the decay of the whole neighborhood, so will its rebirth play an important role in revitalization. Without the commercial services, North Omaha cannot offer the conveniences needed by residents, or attract shoppers from surrounding neighborhoods. Small businesses are especially important because they strengthen the neighborhood economy by providing services and jobs for local residents. A sound local economy creates jobs and encourages business retention, expansion, and start-ups. Thus, commercial revitalization is central to neighborhood conservation, and will reinforce efforts to redevelop residential areas and attract newcomers and former residents to the area.

Strategies must encourage commercial revitalization through retail development in North Omaha. This encouragement should include investment of public money if necessary to provide support for revitalization. Public/private partnerships are a major way to encourage revitalization. Such partnerships often provide additional jobs for architects, contractors, and building trades workers from the community. They can increase the flow of private capital into North Omaha by decreasing the risk inherent in investments.

The issues discussed here identify special concerns that must be addressed as neighborhood conservation occurs in North Omaha. The age of the dwellings, their size and energy performance, and their architectural character all require special attention as the buildings are rehabilitated. The residents of North Omaha play an important part in neighborhood conservation. As elderly homeowners leave their homes, it is important to insure that their places are taken by new homeowners and responsible investors, rather than speculators who are not concerned about the neighborhood. New investment is needed in neighborhoods, but in such a way as to prevent the displacement of current low and moderate income residents. At the same time, the revitalization process is not yet complete in North Omaha as problems continue with industrial encroachment, incompatible land uses and vacant lots. Additional commercial revitalization is also needed to make the area strong and to support the redevelopment of residential neighborhoods.



3



4

In some cities, revitalization of inner city neighborhoods has had negative effects, particularly when it resulted in displacement of residents. While this has not yet happened in North Omaha, it is important to develop programs now to insure that the current residents benefit from revitalization in North Omaha. At the same time, neighborhood conservation efforts must protect and enhance the character of North Omaha through conservation of housing stock, sensitive rehabilitation and new construction and management of reinvestment. The following goals and strategies provide an overall framework to guide private and public actions as redevelopment proceeds.



1. NOCD Painting Project, 1981
Neighborhood groups have undertaken a number of paint-up and clean-up projects in North Omaha.
(North Omaha Community Development, Inc.)
2. 27th and Decatur Streets, Looking East, 1984
This well-maintained street in the Long School neighborhood was a target area in 1980. Under the City's Target Area Rehabilitation Program.

I. Goal: Insure that current residents play an important role in the redevelopment of North Omaha.

Strategy:

A. Create and maintain partnerships between private investors and public agencies in conjunction with community development programs.

In recent years, the City of Omaha has increasingly used Community Development Block Grant funds to leverage private funds. Through leveraging, the City contributes a portion of the cost of a project while private investors provide the remaining amount. This makes the City's money extend further — an important consideration which anticipates present and future funding cuts. In the past the City has leveraged funds in both neighborhood and economic development programs that resulted in residential and commercial rehabilitation. In connection with this strategy, the City should strive to involve local banks, credit unions and development agencies as partners in revitalization projects, encouraging their further investment in the community.

B. Employ local architects, contractors and the local labor force in community development work.

Just as encouraging commercial revitalization will lead to the creation of jobs and help develop a sound local economy, the employment of professional, technical, and skilled persons from the community will also contribute to the area's economic health. As these workers are paid, their wages are funneled back into the community when they purchase goods or services, which in turn supports local businessmen. By working on projects in their own neighborhood, the workers develop a stake in the outcome of revitalization. The City provides some CDBG funding for agencies that provide assistance to minority contractors, in order to increase their full participation in revitalization efforts.

C. Explore the feasibility of creating a community-wide, non-profit organization devoted to preservation in the black community.

The primary focus of such an organization would be to foster pride and awareness in the black community's history as reflected by the built environment. This group could extend beyond the various neighborhood boundaries, and work with, or as a part of, existing community development agencies for preservation of important buildings. In addition, it would raise the awareness of residents and the general public of the architecture of North Omaha, and provide technical advice on sensitive rehabilitation of residential and commercial buildings. Such an organization would be composed of activist volunteers; however, community support and funding could provide the assistance necessary for the group to become involved in implementation of preservation projects.

D. Encourage neighborhood marketing to attract new construction and new residents to North Omaha.

Neighborhood groups can play an important role in making their neighborhood attractive to new homebuyers and the general public by making them aware of it. As neighborhoods become organized, they often publish newsletters to focus on issues that affect them. Once they have articulated their concerns, they become more active and provide social activities which help develop a neighborhood feeling. Areas with special historic and architectural characteristics sometimes find it profitable to sponsor house tours, or publish guidebooks or walking tours to publicize the neighborhood. Another option is the formation of neighborhood development corporations. Such a corporation may purchase and rehabilitate houses, and sell them to new owners. Because the corporation members often donate their time, these dwellings can be sold at a lower price. This enables low and moderate income persons, or young families who want to enter the housing market, to become homeowners. Proceeds from home sales are utilized by the corporation to purchase additional buildings for rehabilitation and sale.

homeowners receive direct rehabilitation financing through low interest repayable and deferred payment loans.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

II. Goal: Conserve housing units in a sensitive manner while recognizing the needs of individual residents.



Strategy:

A. Continue City-sponsored programs which rehabilitate houses for current residents.

The City already has several programs to rehabilitate housing for current residents in older neighborhoods (see Appendix for a list of 1984 programs). Single family rehabilitation programs address the need to preserve existing single family, predominantly owner-occupied housing and to help low and moderate income persons finance home improvements. Rehabilitation of rental properties is aimed at improving vacant and occupied rental properties which serve low and moderate income residents.

In all cases the objective of these programs is to provide sound housing for both homeowners and renters. In single-family rehabilitation, the work is usually concentrated into strategic portions of neighborhoods with greatest economic and housing needs, in an effort to provide visible concentrated improvement. Rental rehabilitation frequently focuses on the reuse of vacant, but repairable, multi-family structures, returning such buildings to the tax rolls. Additional programs provide assistance to low income elderly and handicapped homeowners, enabling them to remain in their homes. The City also utilizes its funds to leverage low interest home improvement loans, making affordable financing available to low and moderate income homeowners throughout the North Omaha area.

B. Develop programs aimed at increasing the energy efficiency of existing structures.

The City has started a weatherization loan program which provides loans at no interest to low and moderate income homeowners. These loans are used to finance weatherization improvements such as addition of insulation, tight-fitting windows or doors, or weatherstripping and caulking. The Metropolitan Utilities District provides in-kind services to help carry out this program. Loan repayments will be used to establish a revolving fund for future weatherization loans.

Private organizations have also made efforts to inform the community about energy efficiency in housing. The Consumer Services Organization, a private non-profit housing counseling service, has remodeled a home in North Omaha to display weatherization techniques. Similar private sector efforts should be encouraged as a means of acquainting the public with weatherization and energy efficiency in homes. The existing City loan program should continue to help low income residents increase the energy efficiency of their dwellings.

C. Encourage participants in public and private redevelopment and new construction to follow the architectural guidelines in this plan.

The previous section of this plan discussed the architectural styles and types found in North Omaha and identified the important components of each style and type. These characteristics have sometimes been ignored in renovation, and distinctive details, such as porch railings or columns, window details or other exterior features, have been altered. Without these details, the building loses its distinctiveness and an important part of its character. New construction is sometimes out of character with the neighborhood. New buildings that are placed closer to or farther back from the street, or have a different height or roof line, do not match the streetscape and break up its continuity.

Both renovation and new construction can usually be designed to respect the character of the existing dwellings and the neighborhood. As more renovation and new construction occur in North Omaha, private developers, contractors, homeowners and City officials and inspectors should consult the guidelines on architectural styles and types in the previous section. With greater awareness of these architectural features represented in North Omaha, new development can proceed without harming the neighborhood's special qualities.



1. 24th and Ohio Streets, Looking South, 1984
The 24th and Lake business area, the center of Omaha's black business district since the 1920's, possesses the historic and cultural significance to be a potential Landmark Heritage District. In addition, the area contains several individual landmarks including St. John A.M.E. Church, the Great Plains Black Museum and the Jewell Building.

D. Maintain a flexible approach to rehabilitation, balancing the current residents' needs and desires with cost effective sensitive rehabilitation.

Sometimes rehabilitation needs for a dwelling extend beyond energy efficiency or the efforts to provide sound housing and are dictated by the needs of the residents. For example, elderly residents may opt for exterior siding to lessen the maintenance on their home. Other residents may need the living space offered by an enclosed porch. Energy conservation may dictate the replacement of original windows or doors with new, more efficient models. The important point is to maintain a balance among these various concerns in rehabilitation. The resident's desires, the need for energy efficiency, and respect for the architectural integrity of the building (see Strategy II-C) must all be considered by homeowners, contractors and City officials as they undertake renovation of existing buildings in North Omaha.

E. Explore ways to make large dwellings more suitable for today's smaller families and higher energy costs.

Although neighborhood revitalization sometimes results in subdivided dwellings being returned to a single-family residence, such a change is not desirable or practical in all cases. In neighborhoods with very large houses, it may be more reasonable to maintain them as two or three unit dwellings. These large homes were constructed for a time when families were large and domestic help was commonplace for the well-to-do. Few Americans today live in that fashion, or desire such large homes. The cost of maintaining, heating and cooling these dwellings is often prohibitive as well.

However, with two or three units contained in one large residence, each renter has a more reasonably sized apartment, and can contribute to the cost of upkeep. This option has been utilized not only in formerly single-family homes, but also in commercial buildings such as warehouses or abandoned school buildings which have been converted to apartments and condominiums. In an era when there are increasing numbers of single persons and smaller families requiring housing, these large buildings can efficiently meet their needs.

F. Nominate historically and architecturally significant structures and districts for local and national preservation designations, in order to protect their unique character and create public awareness of their contributions to the community.

The process involved in designation of buildings and districts was discussed in the introduction to this plan and in the City's *Comprehensive Program for Historic Preservation*. Simply stated, designation is reserved for buildings, sites and districts which are important for historical, architectural, cultural, engineering, geographic or archaeological reasons. The Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission makes recommendations for designation of buildings and districts to the City Council, which confers the designation.

The designation of important buildings as Landmark Heritage sites can be a starting point in neighborhood conservation. Often, the recognition of these buildings and sometimes entire districts not only provides recognition and honor, but creates community awareness and pride that enhances neighborhood identity and cohesion. Such recognition usually ensures that the buildings will continue to be used.

Designation of important buildings also protects them from defacement and demolition, since any alterations to buildings receiving local designation must be approved by the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission. In addition, listing as a local historic preservation site increases the chances that the building may be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. National Register properties may qualify for federal tax benefits if the property is income producing, such as an apartment or commercial building.

However, preservation designations have perhaps been most useful for creating strong neighborhoods and civic pride. When neighborhoods receive community recognition they work even harder to maintain the area and its special qualities. Designation also provides liaisons with local, state and federal preservation organizations which can offer technical assistance in rehabilitation of

(Omaha City Planning Department)
2. 18th and Wirt Streets, 1984
The Victorian and turn of the century residences of the Kountze Place subdivision qualify for historic district status because of their architectural and historic significance.
(Omaha City Planning Department)



2

structures. It can provide increased opportunities for loans and grants in some instances, and usually increases the willingness of banks to issue loans, particularly in historic districts. Designation of buildings and districts ensures that the historic character of the area will be respected and provides protection from inappropriate new construction or insensitive rehabilitation. By maintaining an area's character, historic district designation will help protect property values. Designation of historic sites and districts is a useful tool to enhance buildings and neighborhoods with special qualities and to insure their survival as redevelopment proceeds.

III. Goal: Prevent loss of additional building stock and encourage new, compatible construction in North Omaha.

Strategy:

A. Recycle vacant or abandoned housing before it deteriorates beyond repair.

An effective mechanism for recycling vacant and abandoned dwellings is the City's Urban Homesteading Program. The City acquires repairable, vacant residential properties, selects new owners for them, and provides low-interest loans for immediate repair costs. Residents are selected on the basis of need for housing, income, and ability of the individual to contribute to the actual restoration work. Residents must agree to remain in the dwelling for three years. The City acquires Urban Homesteading houses through the Land Reutilization Authority, VA and HUD foreclosures, negotiations with owners and occasionally through condemnations. Through Urban Homesteading, existing structures are maintained and repaired, thus preserving neighborhoods. At the same time it encourages investment from both the public and private sectors and increases home ownership in older neighborhoods. The program currently provides approximately 20 dwellings a year and should be expanded, with a concentrated effort on homesteading in the area between 16th and 30th, Cuming to Ames. Although some homesteading has occurred in this area, most dwellings have been on its fringes.

Omaha's Land Reutilization Authority is a mechanism for transferring tax delinquent property to new owners and returning it to the tax rolls. When the county forecloses on tax delinquent property and auctions it at sheriff's sales, the LRA bids the minimum amount (the amount of back taxes up to the time of foreclosure). If no higher bids are received, the LRA is the successful bidder. However, the Authority does not pay for property until it finds another buyer for it, and thus is only in possession of the property during the period the title is being transferred.

While the LRA is a useful mechanism to facilitate resale of tax delinquent property, its efficiency would be increased if the period of delinquency before foreclosure were shortened. Currently, property must be delinquent for at least two years before the LRA can bid on it. The owner is given an additional two years to pay the taxes before any action can be taken. This period, a minimum of four years under optimal circumstances, is a long time for a structure to be vacant, especially since these buildings are often exposed to vandalism and will deteriorate further. A state constitutional amendment is required to shorten the length of time before foreclosure on tax delinquent property. A decrease in this period would allow the LRA to bid on appropriate dwellings before they are threatened with vandalism or deterioration and return them to the tax rolls more quickly. A shortened waiting period before tax foreclosure proceedings would rescue vacant buildings before destruction and maintain them as useful contributors to the neighborhood.

A neighborhood development corporation (see Strategy I-D) can also be active in recycling vacant or abandoned housing. Such a corporation could purchase a vacant dwelling and repair it or sell it as is to a new owner. When it is on a neighborhood level, the corporation may rely on volunteers to repair dwellings and thus can ask a lower price for a rehabilitated house. This process not only saves dwellings, but also engenders a neighborhood spirit which rein-

1. Omaha Housing Authority Duplexes, 28th Avenue and Pinkney Streets, 1984
The Omaha Housing Authority has constructed a number of duplex residences on vacant North Omaha lots in recent years. These units are one effort to provide replacement housing in a neighborhood that has lost many older homes.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

2. Kellom Knoll Apartments, 25th Avenue and Cuming Streets, 1984
Completed in 1983, the Kellom Knoll Apartments were financed by a complex arrangement of public and private investment. Kellom Knoll is the largest privately owned housing development in the history of North Omaha.
(Omaha City Planning Department)



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forces conservation efforts.

B. Provide replacement housing in the neighborhood when housing is lost to redevelopment projects.

Until recently, little new housing has been built in North Omaha. Residents displaced by freeway construction or other projects had few housing options if they wanted to stay in their neighborhood. Only the recent Kellom Heights apartment construction has provided new housing in the area. However, Kellom Heights provides only apartment units, forcing residents who want single-family houses to move away from North Omaha. There is a need for new single-family homes in the neighborhood to attract new residents and provide dwellings for former residents who may be interested in moving back. However, in order to provide replacement housing there must be incentives which will encourage developers to build in North Omaha.

C. Explore the use of incentives to encourage compatible, new construction on vacant lots.

The City's Urban Development Policy offers a variety of incentives to further central city development. The subdivision application fee and sewer connection fees have been waived, and a waiver for residential building permits is being considered. In addition, the City will repair and replace public facilities, upgrade City services and install and/or redevelop public improvements such as streets, sewers and parks and recreation facilities. The area east of 42nd Street also receives special assistance through economic development programs, land acquisition and packaging cost write-down and site preparation and improvement assistance.

The City can play a strong role in this process by supporting projects which demonstrate the marketability of housing in North Omaha. It is important that development projects be located in areas with strong surroundings, areas which can contribute to the success of a project rather than detract from it. Once the site is identified, the City can assist in land acquisition and site preparation. Lastly, the City may help reduce the financial risk for builders by providing partial funds for construction. This support can, in turn, lower costs for homebuyers and keep monthly payments low.

IV. Goal: Provide guidance for reinvestment in North Omaha in order to balance new development and investment with the housing and community concerns of current residents.

Strategy:

A. Provide programs that make it possible for existing residents to remain in their neighborhoods and benefit from improvements.

The bulk of current City programs are aimed at owner-occupants, and thus attempt to help residents remain in their homes. The City provides low interest loans to homeowners to repair their houses. These loans are administered through various programs which meet the needs of targeted audiences such as specific neighborhoods, the elderly and handicapped, and very low income homeowners. However, persons who rent are more vulnerable to displacement if rents rise as a result of redevelopment or sale of a building. As a result, there is also a need for assistance to owners in rental rehabilitation, and later financial assistance to insure that rents in the redeveloped building are not too high for neighborhood residents. The City has instituted a Rental Rehabilitation Demonstration Program to address this problem. Under this program, the City provides partial low cost rehabilitation financing, designed to make a project feasible at moderate rents. It then provides, through the Omaha Housing Authority, Section 8 rental assistance to eligible existing residents of the building. Such a two-tiered program of rehabilitation and rental assistance may be necessary to prevent displacement of present tenants.

3. Duplex Renovation, 1608 and 1610 Locust Street, 1983
(Omaha City Planning Department)



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B. Utilize a variety of techniques to encourage homeownership in North Omaha by existing residents and to attract new homebuyers.

North Omaha is viewed as a risky and unproven market by the homebuilding industry. In this climate, it becomes necessary to develop innovative financing strategies to make new housing available to current residents and to attract new construction and new buyers on vacant lots. Such financial assistance must lower construction costs and risks to builders, who can then pass along lower costs to purchasers. At the same time, the homebuyers need assistance to lower the initial down payment and to keep monthly payments at a reasonable level. A mixture of public and private financing to guarantee low interest loans to builders, or partial financing for developers, spreads any risk among a variety of agencies and encourages wide participation in redevelopment activity.

Tax exempt revenue bonds, combined with federal monies and private grants, may also support projects in a specially defined area. By virtue of their tax exempt status, such bonds may lower the interest rate on home mortgages and project financing. North Omaha has been certified as a "targeted area" by the U.S. Treasury. This removes some of the most restrictive provisions covering tax exempt housing revenue bonds.

Vacant houses can also provide opportunities for moderate cost homeownership through Urban Homesteading (see Strategy III-A). The revitalized homes within North Omaha can assist in the conservation of neighborhoods within those boundaries. Neighborhood development corporations can also work to attract new residents. Such groups can not only market their area and promote it, but may also purchase and rehabilitate homes for resale. Their use of volunteer labor and contributions can be passed on to eventual buyers, thus lowering the costs of housing.

C. Investigate the possibility of forming a neighborhood based land and housing trust which could purchase property for later redevelopment and keep ownership within the community.

The formation of a neighborhood based group to purchase and hold property has been an effective mechanism for neighborhood redevelopment in many cities. It is particularly effective in neighborhoods with absentee landlords, or in areas where displacement may occur. A functioning land trust in North Omaha could provide some control over possible future speculative investment that could lead to displacement.

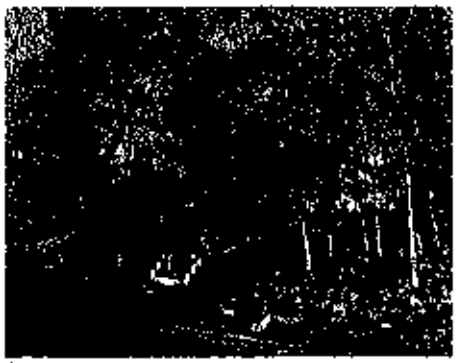
A land trust would be created as a non-profit organization with a revolving fund to finance purchases. In some cases the trust would purchase vacant property which it could hold for later redevelopment. The trust could also purchase houses which it would rehabilitate and sell to homebuyers. In some cities, these organizations have rehabilitated multi-family buildings which they then sold to residents to operate as cooperatives.

Land trusts must develop mechanisms for acquiring land at low cost. As nonprofit corporations, they can accept real property contributions. This provides a tax deduction for the contributor. Land trusts, however, must be careful not to inherit large liabilities of back taxes and special assessments. The Land Reutilization Authority can assist in this area.

This organization could function as a neighborhood redevelopment corporation as discussed in Strategy I-D. At the same time, it might be a useful umbrella organization to assume the functions of a neighborhood based preservation organization as well. A neighborhood based organization could provide guidance for reinvestment in North Omaha by insuring that neighborhood residents have opportunities to purchase homes.

D. Develop an early warning system to monitor negative land ownership changes in North Omaha.

Numerous studies have pointed out that the time to worry about displacement is before the revitalization process begins. Although displacement has occurred in North Omaha through public actions, it has not resulted to a great degree from neighborhood revitalization activity. However, as part of an effort to guide



1. Area Near 18th and Burdette Streets, 1984
Neglected vacant lots quickly become neighborhood eyesores which can create health problems when they attract rodents and insect pests. At the same time, vacant lots offer the land needed for new construction in North Omaha. (Omaha City Planning Department)
2. Neighborhood Meeting, 1984
Neighborhood organizations work with the

reinvestment in North Omaha so that it best benefits the current residents of the area, it is necessary to establish a system to monitor neighborhood change. No method is foolproof when dealing with such an elusive societal change. As a result, any neighborhood monitoring system should rely on efforts in several different areas.

Both the City and neighborhoods themselves should watch for such changes. Observation is an excellent monitoring tool. By carefully watching what happens to property in their neighborhood and examining real estate ads, residents may be able to solve some problems before they occur.

However, by the time real estate changes hands, it may be too late for the neighborhood to react. The City should establish an ongoing system to monitor its in-city neighborhoods. There are a variety of ways to tie the system into an existing framework. The City's annual Urban Development Policy Evaluation already groups information on housing into sectors, based on major east-west streets. The in-city housing data should be similarly broken down into more comparable neighborhood areas, rather than imposed zone areas which cover large dissimilar portions of the City. Median selling price for these neighborhood areas could be gathered from the sales transaction file in order to show the increase in sales price each year. The policy evaluation also analyzes building permit activity by zone, which could be broken down into neighborhood areas.

Another opportunity to monitor neighborhood change is the Planning Department's biannual Intercensal Estimating System (ICES) report. The ICES contains data on mean sales value and mean rent, along with population and housing data. The housing information identifies the number of owner and renter occupied units as well as vacancies, all of which can be analyzed back to the mid-1970's. Although the ICES has broken down information into census tracts, the data could be aggregated into neighborhoods for analysis of change.

Another potential method for monitoring change in specific areas is through overlay zoning (see Strategy V-D). Such zones provide special review of projects within a specified area. Once the City establishes an overlay zone in an area that needs special protection, it can be used to provide additional controls over building permits or rezoning in that area. An Historic Preservation District is one example of an overlay zone; similar zones could be established for other areas with special needs. The City's zoning code is currently being rewritten, and overlay zones must be added to the City Code before they could be utilized.

V. Goal: Utilize and enforce zoning laws as a tool for neighborhood conservation.

Strategy:

A. Enforce current zoning laws to prevent illegal uses and zoning violations in neighborhoods.

The enforcement of zoning laws is often difficult in older urban areas. What was acceptable when these areas were built up may now be considered a nonconforming use. Although these uses are legal through grandfather rights, it becomes difficult to distinguish between nonconforming uses and actual zoning violations. Zoning problems in older areas have often been going on for a long time, exerting a long-term negative effect on the area.

The City should make a concentrated effort to methodically enforce zoning and municipal codes. A special enforcement program, targeted in sections of the City with particular needs, could provide a systematic analysis of code and zoning violations, and identify health-related concerns dealing with rodents, pests, weeds and litter. Only such an overall, systematic analysis will enable the City to deal with older neighborhoods that have not had a careful assessment in recent years.

In addition, more consistent prosecution of violators is necessary to insure that systematic code and zoning analysis achieve their desired result. Through systematic code and zoning enforcement and consistent prosecution the City will be better able to utilize zoning laws as an effective tool for neighborhood

City's Community Developers to establish target areas and short-term programs for their neighborhoods.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

conservation.

However, systematic code and zoning enforcement may reveal violations that can threaten the use of buildings. Particularly in the use of historic buildings, violations that are expensive to repair may, in effect, end the use of such buildings. Some cities have established guidelines which determine when historic buildings may be granted waivers from zoning regulations regarding matters such as parking, yard requirements, fencing and building height. As Omaha's zoning code is revised, these problems with identified historic buildings should be considered and appropriate guidelines developed. The use of similar guidelines for the building code should also be studied and added to the code if appropriate.



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B. *Encourage greater participation by neighborhood groups in monitoring rezoning cases and zoning enforcement.*

Neighborhood organizations can be more effective in dealing with zoning problems through observation and active participation in City processes. Residents must be willing to notify City inspectors if they see violations occurring. Neighborhood organizations must educate themselves about zoning — how it works and can be used to help their neighborhood. Once they become familiar with the law, they can stay aware of activity in their area by scanning the agendas of the City Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board, both of which appear in newspapers or are available through the City Planning Department. The City notifies property owners within 300 feet of the site of any zoning change, but a regular reading of board activity can ensure that the entire neighborhood is informed.

Neighborhood groups have power to influence boards when they take the time to prepare their case and present reasons why they support or oppose any zoning activity. Some neighborhood organizations have initiated downzoning, in which they petitioned for more restrictive zoning in order to prevent further conversion of homes into multi-family units. In other cases, neighborhood support of zoning changes necessary for major, desirable development projects can help bring those projects to reality.

In general, neighborhood organizations need to be vigilant, maintaining a continual watchdog effort to identify violations and to follow up on prosecution. By keeping inspectors informed of problems in their area, neighborhood organizations can work with the City to use zoning to their best advantage.

C. *City officials and boards should continue to perform a careful review of rezoning requests in order to consider the impact of such requests on the surrounding neighborhood.*

The City staff subdivision review committee examines zoning and platting cases for each month's planning board agenda. This committee includes representatives from the Planning Department's planning implementation division, comprehensive planning, housing and community development, as well as the preservation administrator. Because this meeting occurs early in the monthly review process, there is adequate time for an analysis of neighborhood impact from each area of the Planning Department. Other comments are solicited from agencies which monitor health and environmental concerns. These comments are then utilized in the department recommendations for each case presented to the Planning Board.

In addition, the City Planning Board, which bears major responsibility for examining zoning and subdivision activity, is generally balanced to include persons more familiar with the in-city areas as well as others more attentive to suburban development. The Planning Board inspects each case on location before its monthly meeting and should have adequate knowledge for a careful review of any rezonings.

Rezonings must be approved by the City Council. Council members are now elected by district, insuring that at least one council member should be aware of the special problems presented in any part of the City.

However, despite all these opportunities for careful review, it is important to



1. 22nd and Miami Streets, 1984
This street in the OIC neighborhood has the cohesiveness and quality of housing stock that make it a potential area for conservation.
(Omaha City Planning Department)
2. Jewell Building, 2221 North 24th Street, 1980
The Jewell Building, a City Landmark, will be rehabilitated for office use. After rehabilitation,

insure that both City officials and boards are aware of problems in rezonings. This role is best played by neighborhood residents, who will suffer the greatest harm, or reap the greatest benefits from zoning changes.

D. Explore the use of zoning overlay districts to augment existing zoning in areas which require protection of special characteristics.

Zoning overlay districts offer controls beyond those provided under traditional zoning regulations. These districts derive their name from being overlayed on traditional zoning in a given area. Once in place, the overlay district can modify zoning and provide special review of any actions within areas so designated. Although the City does not currently have zoning overlay districts, they could be included in the revision of the zoning code.

Overlay districts may focus on a variety of concerns. Some communities have overlay districts for design review, and provide guidelines on the types of buildings that will be constructed in a particular area. This approach is frequently used to provide controls for downtown business districts, but can also be used by neighborhood groups to influence new construction design.

Other overlay districts are used to guard environmental considerations. These districts can be applied to areas where there are particular topographical or vegetation problems. Typical reasons for such overlays are to protect hillsides and steep terrain, or mature vegetation from development that will destroy it or cause severe erosion.

Environmental districts have included areas of high public investment. An overlay may be established to protect a revitalized area and insure that there is no recurrence of blight. In this manner, the City can provide additional review of other work in the revitalized area and make certain that it enhances and contributes to the major investment already in the district.

Neighborhood housing retention overlays have also been used to halt residential demolitions, particularly in low/moderate income neighborhoods where sound, available housing may be in short supply. Such regulations require a special review before a demolition permit can be used for a structure in the retention area.

Interim development controls provide a temporary overlay which allows for special analysis of a district during a fixed period of time. During the six months or year that these controls are in effect, no demolitions, alterations or new construction is allowed. The City utilizes the time to carry out analysis on land use and development in the area in an effort to promote orderly growth.

Overlay districts can be an effective mechanism to provide protection for inner city neighborhoods. They can also be implemented throughout the City without adding special geographically based districts to the zoning code itself. However, overlay districts, or any other innovative regulatory tool, should increase the chances of good development and decrease the chances of bad development. They should not place undue obstacles in the way of desirable investments.

VI. Goal: Encourage business revitalization as an integral part of the conservation of North Omaha.

Strategy:

A. Promote the creation and growth of small businesses through technical assistance and seed capital programs.

Small businesses are the source of the vast majority of new jobs created each year in this country. At the same time, the survival rate of new small businesses is relatively low. This is usually attributable to a lack of management experience or available capital. A number of public and private sources exist for technical assistance and for venture capital. The City has compiled information on existing programs and has prepared a videotape and pamphlet to advertise the available assistance. However, a need still exists for an outreach program to seek out potential entrepreneurs within the community and advise them on

the building will provide an anchor for the southern end of the proposed historic district just as the Blue Lion Center anchors the 24th and Lake intersection.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

how to start a business at the very early conceptual stage of development. Similarly, a need exists for seed capital specifically for new business start-up. The City, the private sector, and the existing service providers are planning the creation of a Seed Capital Fund and Entrepreneurial Advisory Office to meet these needs.



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B. Develop partnerships between public and private investors to develop commercial and industrial facilities.

Business revitalization in North Omaha requires a partnership between business owner-operators or developers and the public sector. Public funds and assistance can leverage private investment for renovation or new construction by providing a financial incentive or by reducing the risk of development. The partnership benefits the public by creating a better physical environment, employment opportunities, access to goods and services, and added tax base. The private sector benefits from the new opportunity for a return on its investment and from the increased economic activity. The City should continue to involve local financial institutions, private developers, and entrepreneurs in the revitalization process.

C. Provide new small businesses with sound, low overhead physical facilities.

The cost of facilities can be a major expense for a new small business and can hamper the business' opportunity for growth. The cost of a facility includes the cost of utilities, maintenance and repairs, and inefficiencies in design or layout. Sound, low overhead physical facilities often have a lower "real" cost than do deteriorated facilities. Additionally, good facilities permit the entrepreneur to concentrate on the growth of his/her business and to attract greater numbers of customers. A business incubator is a building that provides sound, low overhead space and services to multiple small business tenants. The development of an incubator should be pursued by the City and the private sector.

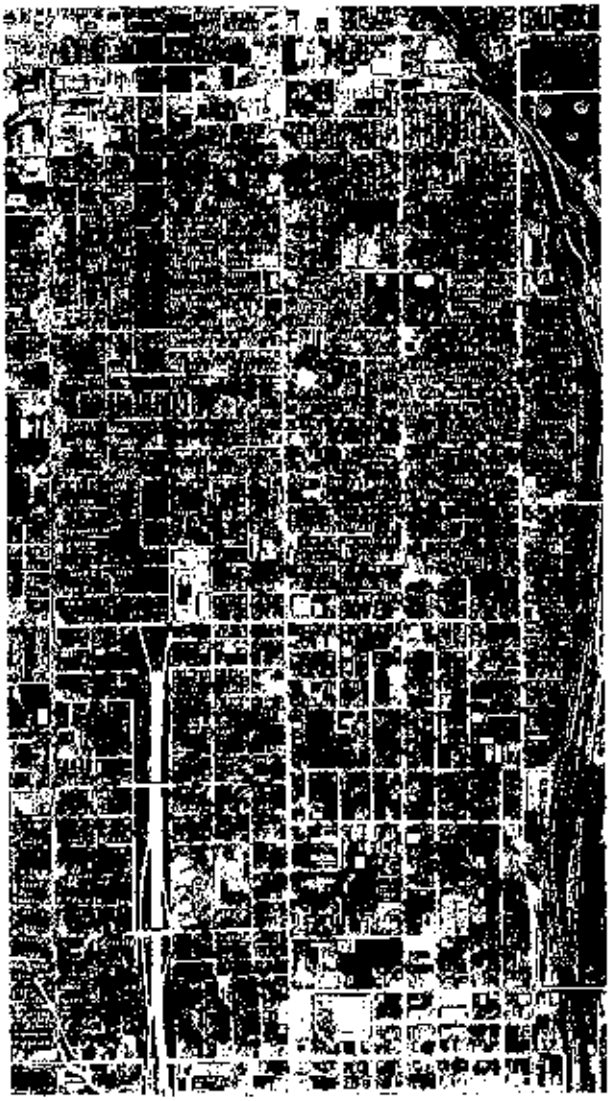
D. Encourage the re-use of historic buildings for commercial revitalization.

Historic structures are an asset to a business district for attracting customers. The preservation of sound historic structures and the sensitive renovation of adjacent structures should be a priority of the City and the merchants. Through marketing of the tax benefits of historic properties and design control over the City-financed renovation, together with the support of the neighborhood business organization, the City can encourage the re-use of historic buildings.

E. Encourage the development of new businesses which provide goods and services currently not available in North Omaha.

Opportunities exist for the development of new businesses meeting needs in the marketplace in North Omaha. The conservation of the neighborhood requires that residents have access to goods and services. A proposed Entrepreneurial Advisory Office would seek out potential entrepreneurs within the community and advise them on how to start a business that will fill voids in the marketplace.

V. Buildings and Areas Identified for Conservation



1. 2060 Florence Boulevard,1984
This house qualifies for Landmark Designation because of its unusual mix of Gothic and Queen Anne architectural elements and concrete block construction. Requests for Landmark Designation, usually made by the property owner, are forwarded to the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission and the City Council for consideration.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

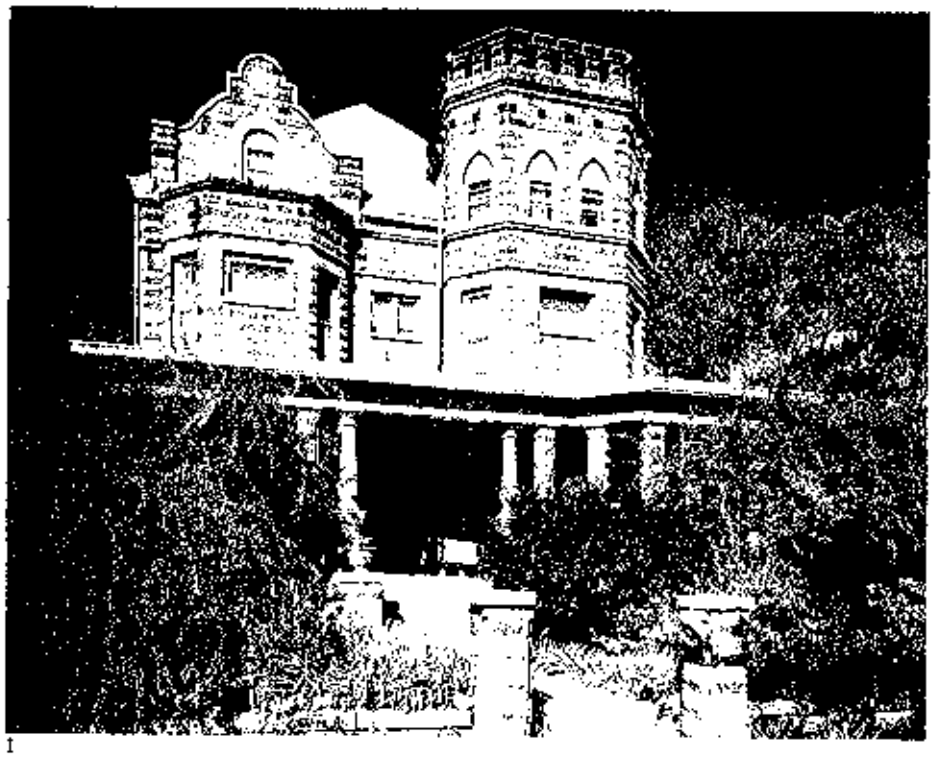
2. The Strehlow Terrace Apartment Complex, 2024 North 16th Street, 1983
The Strehlow Terrace Apartments are a unique example of early apartment construction in Omaha, and form a potential historic district. The team of builder Robert Strehlow and architect Frederick Henninger created Omaha's first apartment complex with amenities such as recreational facilities and an automotive garage. Constructed between 1905 and 1909, the buildings reflect an unusual mix of elements from the Arts and Crafts movement, Japanese construction and the Prairie style of architecture.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

A primary goal of this report, as stated in the Introduction, is the identification of important buildings and neighborhoods for conservation in North Omaha. These areas are identified and mapped on the following pages. As the final result of this study, the Survey Map unifies the various sections that have preceded it. The History of North Omaha provided a framework for establishing significance of areas and potential landmarks. As the basis for the architectural analysis, the survey identified buildings of architectural importance. Lastly, the Goals and Strategies can be carried out in the various areas where they are most applicable.

Based on historical and architectural significance, four categories of buildings and neighborhoods have been identified as follows:

1. Individual structures of Landmark quality
2. Landmark Heritage Districts
3. Conservation Neighborhoods
4. Areas of potential

The inventory of an area's significant buildings, sites and districts is the foundation for future public and private actions in North Omaha. This information will be integrated with city-wide comprehensive plan elements, capital spending programs and community development activities, to provide guidance for conserving the heritage of North Omaha.



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Individual Structures of Landmark Quality

Individual Landmark structures may qualify for designation on the basis of historical, architectural, cultural, engineering, geographic or archaeological importance. The building owner generally applies for designation, although Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission and City Council members may also request designation of structures. Applications for designation are made to the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission and then forwarded to the Planning Board and City Council for approval. Landmark status provides that a building cannot be demolished, or its exterior altered or modified without review by the Landmarks Commission, a process designed to prevent any alterations which could harm the character of the building. Among the individually designated Landmarks in North Omaha are St. John A.M.E. Church, Webster Telephone Exchange



1. 24th and Lake Streets, 1984

The 24th and Lake business/cultural area contains many of the institutions and buildings important to the history of black Omahans. Along with buildings that are individual Landmarks, there are a number that contribute to the character of the district as a whole. Although many structures have undergone alterations, the area still conveys its importance as a center of black community life.

(Omaha City Planning Department)



2. 18th and Wirt Streets, Kountze Place Neighborhood, 1984

A potential residential historic district is in the Kountze Place neighborhood. With houses that date to the 1880's and represent the work of most of Omaha's major architects of that era, Kountze Place represents a gracious life that began to fade

(Great Plains Black Museum), Sacred Heart Church, and the Jewell Building (see Survey Map). Other structures which are eligible for designation are listed on page 104.

Landmark Heritage Districts

Landmark Heritage Districts are specially designated areas that are of particular historic, cultural or architectural value to the entire city. The application for a Landmark Heritage District, which is initiated upon petition of a majority of the property owners, must be presented to the Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission and passed by City Council ordinance. Only areas that meet the specific criteria outlined in the Landmark Heritage Preservation Ordinance qualify for district status. Once established, however, district status provides the strongest controls for maintaining a neighborhood's character through Landmarks Commission review of all new construction, demolitions, and significant exterior alteration of buildings within the district.

Three areas within the North Omaha area, as indicated on the Survey Map, are eligible for consideration as Landmark Heritage Districts. They are the 24th and Lake business/cultural area, a residential district centered in the Kountze Place subdivision, and an apartment district that lines North 16th Street.

The 24th and Lake business/cultural area is the historic heart of Omaha's black community. As the center of the black business district since the 1920's, the area contains many of the most important cultural institutions including churches, as well as business and commercial buildings which are already Landmarks or eligible for individual Landmark status.

The Kountze Place residential area is important because of its fine Victorian houses, many of which were designed by notable Omaha architects. It was also the suburban home of many of the city's rising business and professional leaders at the turn of the century.

The North 16th Street apartment area is significant for both historic and architectural reasons. The concentration of multi-family buildings reflects the change of North 16th Street from a country drive into an urban thoroughfare as apartments replaced the country estates that previously lined the street. These structures are anchored by the 1897 Sherman Apartments

as lifestyles changed by 1910. As an upper middle class suburb at the turn of the century, Kountze Place attracted the rising business and professional leaders of the day who built their homes to reflect their community status.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

3. 19th and Sprague Streets, Potential Conservation Neighborhood, 1984
Conservation neighborhoods reflect an overall quality of environment that should be maintained. These areas may lack the historic or architectural significance of an historic district, or they may be areas that do not want an historic district and the stronger controls it offers. Conservation neighborhoods have an overall continuity of architecture, landscaping or public improvements that unify them and give them a sense of neighborhood feeling.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

4. 2000 Block of Florence Boulevard, Area of Potential, 1984
Areas of potential are smaller groupings of houses that have some neighborhood cohesiveness but lack the overall continuity and size of a conservation neighborhood. These areas are positive elements to integrate into future neighborhood redevelopment activities.
(Omaha City Planning Department)

and the 1905-09 Strehlow Terrace Apartments, and represent a range of architectural styles from Neo-Classical Revival to Prairie Style.

Neighborhood Conservation Areas

Conservation neighborhoods possess a quality of housing stock, mature landscaping, major public improvements or institutional buildings that establish cohesiveness and continuity in an area. Although such neighborhoods may not qualify for, or desire, the controls established through Landmark Heritage Districts, the conservation areas are distinctive because of their overall quality of environment.

Physically, these areas are generally well maintained and frequently display good examples of vernacular architecture. Residential structures are consistent with one another in scale, detail, material, spacing and setback. The overall continuity of the areas identified for neighborhood conservation contributes to their positive identity and their unique "sense of place."

Areas of Potential

Located throughout the North Omaha area are small groups of houses that show potential as starting points for future neighborhood development. Such areas possess some of the physical characteristics that provide neighborhood cohesiveness, such as consistency of building type, scale, material, siting or landscaping and other elements that contribute to a "sense of place," but lack the size or overall continuity of a conservation neighborhood. These areas are positive elements in a neighborhood, and the effects of any proposed work near them should be considered before new construction, redevelopment or demolition proceeds.



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Survey Map Key

29

Individual Structures of Landmark Quality

These structures are either designated Landmarks or appear to meet the criteria for designation as individual Landmarks. The list is based on the historical and architectural analysis of North Omaha. Some structures other than those listed may also qualify for individual designation based on further research. Additionally, some buildings that are located within areas shown as potential Landmark Heritage Districts might also qualify as individual Landmarks. Those structures are not listed here, however, because they are primarily important for their contribution to the significance of an area rather than being particularly significant individually. An *"L."* following the listing indicates that the building has been locally designated as a Landmark. An *"NR"* indicates National Register of Historic Places status.

1. 4301 North 28th Street
2. Isaac Bailey House, 2816 Pratt Street
3. Site of Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition; Pinkney to Pratt Street, 16th to 24th Street *(L)*
4. Former Clair Memorial United Methodist Church, 2443 Evans Street
5. 2413 Emmet Street
6. Faith Temple Church of God in Christ, 2108 Emmet Street
7. Second Baptist Church, 1802 Emmet Street
8. Paradise Baptist Church, 2124 Lothrop Street
9. Rising Star Baptist Church, 1823 Lothrop Street
10. Calvin Memorial Presbyterian Church, 3105 North 24th Street
11. George Shepard House, 1802 Wirt Street *(L)*
12. Charles Storz House, 1901 Wirt Street
13. Sacred Heart Catholic Church, 2206 Binney Street *(L, NR)*
14. Sacred Heart Catholic Church Complex, 2218 Binney Street *(NR)*
15. John Bay House, 2024 Binney Street *(L)*
16. George Kelly House, 1924 Binney Street *(L, NR)*
17. Hope Lutheran Church, 2723 North 30th Street
18. Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Carbarn, 26th and Lake Street
19. G. Wade Obee House, 2518 Lake Street
20. Broomfield Apartments, 2502-10 Lake Street
21. Great Plains Black Museum, 2213 Lake Street *(L, NR)*
22. The Sherman Apartments, 16th and Lake Street
23. St. John A.M.E. Church, 2402 North 22nd Street *(L, NR)*
24. Jewell Building, 2221-25 North 24th Street *(L, NR)*
25. Zion Baptist Church, 2215 Grant Street
26. Hawkins Block, 2120 North 24th Street
27. Morningstar Baptist Church, 2053 North 20th Street
28. 2060 Florence Boulevard
29. The Strehlow Terrace Apartment Complex, 2024 North 16th Street
30. Storz Brewing Company Smokestack, 16th and Clark Street
31. Harry Buford House, 1804 North 30th Street *(L)*
32. Cleves Temple C.M.E. Church, 2431 Decatur Street
33. Bethel A.M.E. Church, 2428 Franklin Street
34. Tabernacle Church of Christ Holiness, 1521 North 25th Street
35. Poor Claires Monastery, 29th and Hamilton Street
36. Pilgrim Baptist Church, 2503 Hamilton Street
37. Holy Family Church, 18th and Izard Street
38. 929 North 16th Street
39. J.F. Bloom Company Building, 1702 Cuming Street
40. Ford Motor Company Building, 901 North 16th Street
41. Grace Tabernacle Church of God in Christ, and parsonage, 1801 Cuming Street and 818 North 18th Street

Landmark Heritage Districts

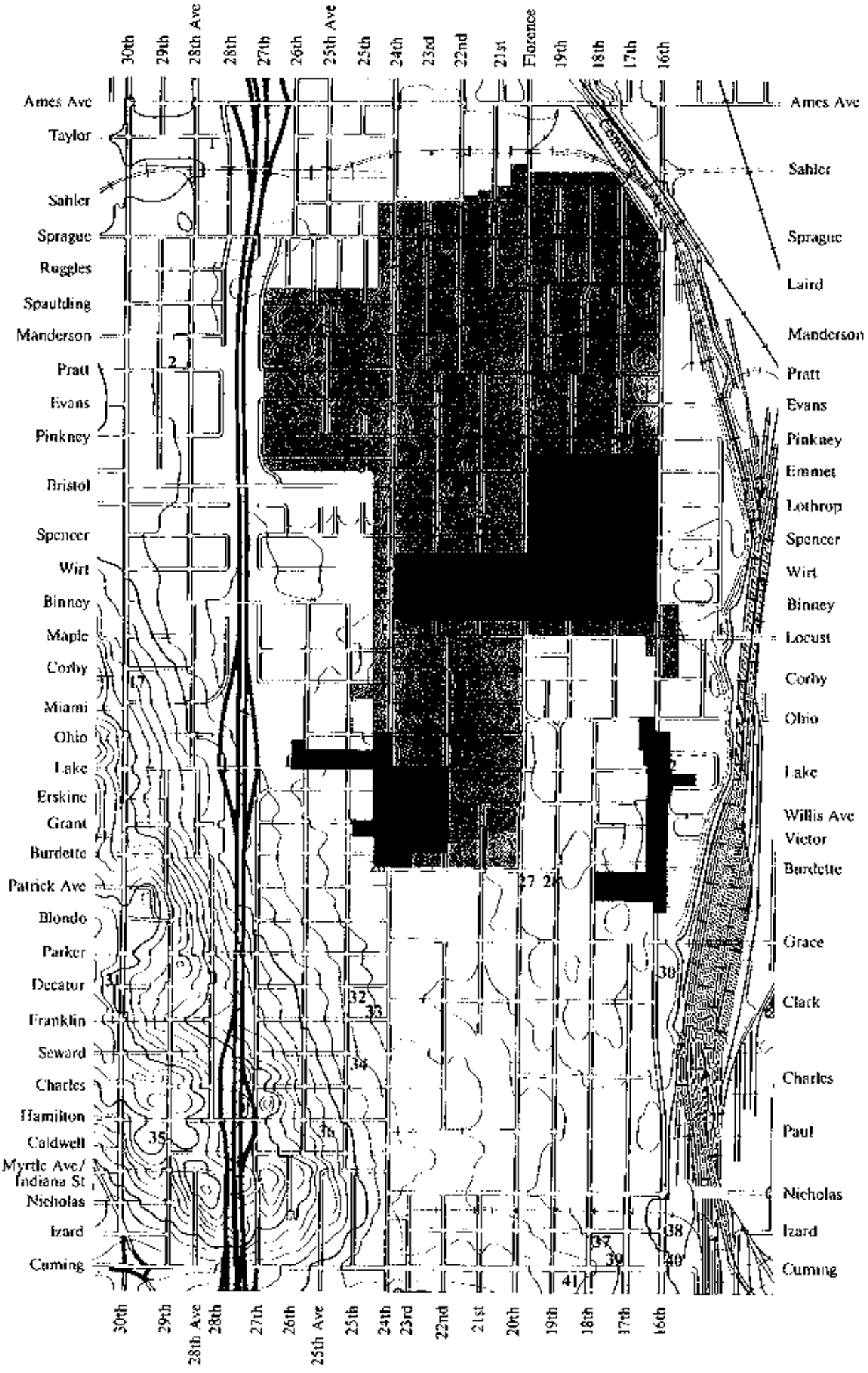
These areas possess sufficient historical, architectural or cultural value to be considered for designation as historic districts.

Neighborhood Conservation Areas

These neighborhoods reflect a high quality of environment because of their continuity of architecture, landscaping or public improvements. Although they may lack the historical or architectural significance of an historic district, they are important areas to maintain and enhance.

Areas of Potential

These are small groups of houses that show potential as starting points for future neighborhood development.


30th
29th
28th Ave
28th
27th
26th
25th Ave
25th
24th
23rd
22nd
21st
Florence
19th
18th
17th
16th
Ames Ave
Taylor
Sahler
Sprague
Ruggles
Spaulding
Manderson
Pratt
Evans
Pinkney
Bristol
Spencer
Wirt
Binney
Maple
Corby
Miami
Ohio
Lake
Erskine
Grant
Burdette
Patrick Ave
Blondo
Parker
Decatur
Franklin
Seward
Charles
Hamilton
Caldwell
Myrtle Ave/
Indiana St
Nicholas
Izard
Cuming
Ames Ave
Sahler
Sprague
Laird
Manderson
Pratt
Evans
Pinkney
Emmet
Lothrop
Spencer
Wirt
Binney
Locust
Corby
Ohio
Lake
Willis Ave
Victor
Burdette
Grace
Clark
Charles
Paul
Nicholas
Izard
Cuming
30th
29th
28th Ave
28th
27th
26th
25th Ave
25th
24th
23rd
22nd
21st
20th
19th
18th
17th
16th

VI. Appendix Description of Block Grant Programs

The following list describes Community Development Block Grant programs for neighborhood and economic development. Each year some programs may be concentrated in specific neighborhoods, while other special, limited programs are established to meet various residential and commercial needs. This list shows only programs that are likely to be repeated each year and omits one-time special programs. The proposed Community Development Block Grant program is presented in late January each year with a public hearing allowing adequate opportunity for public comment. For further information on the Community Development Block Grant program, see the Planning Department's *Statement of Objectives and Proposed Use of Funds.*

Neighborhood Development

Single Family Rehabilitation

1. *Target Area Rehabilitation Program*
 a. Direct rehabilitation financing in small target areas through low interest repayable and deferred payment loans.
 b. Supporting public improvements in target areas.
2. *Reinvestment Area Program (RAP)*
 Low interest loans for rehabilitation, home improvements and energy conservation. Funding provided by a mixture of public and private monies.
3. *Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS)*
 Contribution to a high-risk revolving loan fund in specified NHS neighborhood.
4. *Emergency Repair Program*
 Grants to very low income homeowners to repair critical housing emergencies.
5. *Elderly/Handicapped and Handyman Program*
 Low interest loans to make houses accessible to elderly and disabled owners. Minor repairs for elderly residents through Handyman Program.
6. *Weatherization*
 Zero interest, short term energy conservation loans to low and moderate income homeowners for weatherization.

Rental Rehabilitation

1. *Rental Rehabilitation*
 Construction and long-term financing in specific neighborhoods for projects involving the rehabilitation of multi-family structures. Projects include both occupied units and vacant buildings.

Housing Development

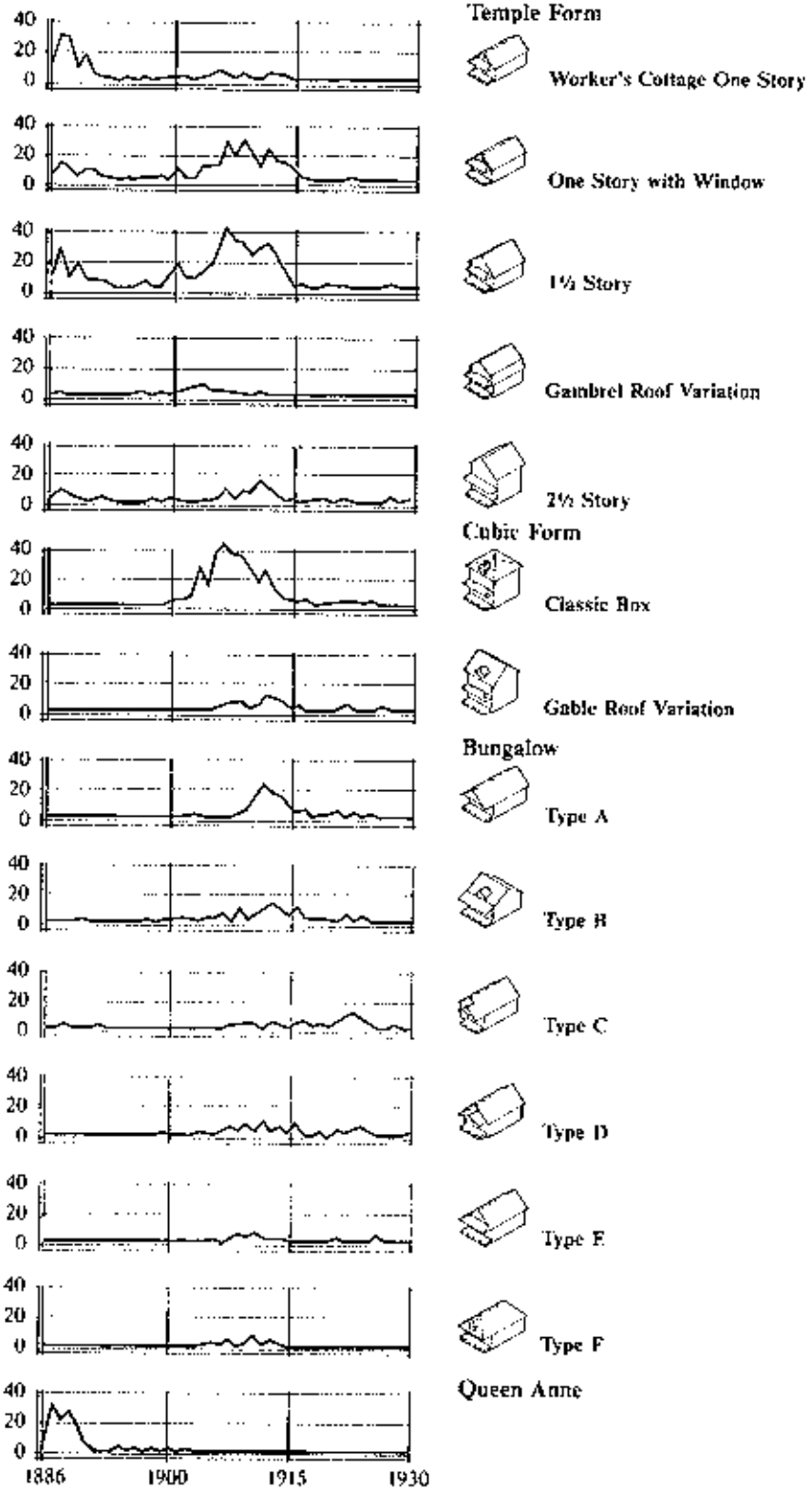
1. *Urban Homesteading*
 Acquisition and homesteading of vacant houses to new owners. Rehab loans for move-in costs will be provided.
2. *Infill Development*
 Land acquisition, utility hookups and partial financing to encourage moderate cost housing development in revitalization areas. Development will consist of new construction of owner-occupied housing.

Economic Development

1. *Economic Development Fund*
 Flexible fund for economic development and job creating projects, including:
 - Commercial/residential re-use projects in inner city business districts.
 - Leveraged commercial rehabilitation loan and shop-steading programs.
 - Public improvements in inner city business areas.

Building Timeline Summary

This composite chart, made up of the individual graphs shown in Section III, can be used to compare the relative popularity of each vernacular type for the years 1886 to 1930. Construction dates were taken from original building permit information, when available.



VII. Endnotes

II. A History of North Omaha

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20. See Section III for a detailed discussion of the Queen Anne style.
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23. Ward, pp. 55, 66; Chudacoff, pp. 65-67.
24. See *A Comprehensive Program for Historic Preservation* for a complete discussion of Omaha's ethnic groups and South Omaha. I am indebted to Dr. Joseph S. Wood, geography department, University of Nebraska at Omaha for introducing me to the relationships between ethnicity, work and industrial location. This discussion, and many general comments about the growth of North Omaha, are based on his insights.
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21. Spear, pp. 181-184.
22. *Omaha Guide*, April 12, 1930; Pinkett, "Sketch of the Omaha Negro," p. 37.
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53. Knapple, p. 51.
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2. Ibid., pp. 160, 162-163. See also Donald Louis Stevens, Jr., "The Urban Renewal Movement in Omaha, 1954 - 1970" (M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1981), pp. 23-24.
3. *Omaha World-Herald*, August 18, 1950; Omaha Housing Authority, *Update Omaha* (1982 Annual Report), pp. 7-10.
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